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It Became Somehow Personal.

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It Became Somehow Personal.

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It Became Somehow Personal

Kimberly Grace Belflower, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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This thesis explores the inspiration and development of my two plays, *Lost Girl* and *Gondal*, and how those two processes mirror my own personal inspiration and development in graduate school. I will examine the relationship between my personal and artistic selves as the central pillar in my artmaking. As a framework for inquiry, I will also explore the work I'm writing in conversation with: the direct source material for my plays as well as the other work I read throughout my development process (Rebecca Solnit's The Faraway Nearby, Maggie Nelson's Bluets, and Anne Carson's *The Glass Essay*) and how my relationship with outside material makes its way into my work.

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**1. The self is also a creation.
(books and care)**

“The self is also a creation, the principal work of your life, the crafting of which makes everyone an artist.”

- Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby

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Earlier this semester, I closed my last production as an MFA Playwriting candidate at the University of Texas at Austin. The play was called *Gondal*, and during the curtain call, a character named Kimberly Belflower gets the last bow. This moment felt like a particularly apt metaphor for where I’ve ended up at the end of these three years – centering myself, at last, in my narrative both onstage and off.

Before coming to UT, I often ended up as the peripheral figure in any given group in my life. In my family, I was the black sheep who strayed from the Traditional Belflower path, the one who had different priorities and didn’t fit in with the small town Southern culture. In my friendships, I was the third wheel for couples, the tag-a-long at events, the perpetual nurturer and advice-giver. In my career, I found a way to monetize these personal tendencies and became a nanny, a professional caretaker for two young children (and an assistant to their parents, which was yet another way of caretaking). While I loved – and still love – taking care of other people, it became clear that I was being both trained and paid to sideline my own wants and needs in favor of prioritizing others. Applying to graduate school was the first time in my adult life I prioritized *me* and what I wanted, which was terrifying. Instead of being paid, I was paying others, in a way, to take care of my professional life.

“Like many others who turned into writers, I disappeared into books when I was very young, disappeared into them like someone running into the woods. What surprised me

and still surprises me is that there was another side to the forest of stories and the solitude, that I came out that other side and met people there.”

-Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby

I read The Faraway Nearby in an English class during my third year of graduate school. As a playwright, I wasn't required to take classes outside of my area; I registered for this class because in my first two years at UT, I'd learned that my writing practice is tied directly to my reading practice, but my schedule was so full that I only had time to read if I was being graded. Rebecca Solnit's book spoke to me in all kinds of ways. In it, she starts with a highly specific, personal story and steadily spirals out into other stories – ones she read or heard, from fairy tales to Frankenstein to scientific articles – returning again and again to the relationship between reading and writing. Somehow, Solnit ties it all together, back to her central idea: the creation of art and self. As I read the book, the overlapping spirals and stories and self, I thought *That's what I want to do.*

Ever since I was twelve years old, I've carried a book with me wherever I go. I'd been a big reader even before then, but the summer I turned twelve, I had an awful experience with bullies at summer camp that fundamentally changed my disposition. It was a music theory summer camp in which we only worked on gospel songs (a typical Southern Appalachian peculiarity I didn't recognize as peculiar until much later in my life). I loved music theory, it came easily to me, and I moved up to an advanced class in my first summer there, which upset some of the other campers my age who'd been attending the camp for years. They took it personally.

Up until this point in my life, I made friends easily. I was outgoing and effusive, unafraid to talk to new people, always willing to try new things. The bullying started slowly and unfolded in the typical way – first whispers, then rumors and name-calling, then public exclusions and humiliations. (The details matter to me, but they don't matter here.) I was traumatized, but unwilling to cause a scene and jeopardize my access to this camp that I loved. So one night I came up with a quiet plan and did what I had to do to survive – I packed a book in my bag the next day, and every day after. I sat in the front row of the camp classrooms so I couldn't see the faces of my tormentors. Every time there was a spare second between sessions, I sat in the most unobtrusive place possible and buried my head in a book. I didn't go to the cafeteria to eat; I sat alone somewhere secret. I read my book. I went home. I read another book. I read five books in a week. I read a book a day for the rest of the summer, even after camp ended. That summer changed the way I saw myself in relationship to the world. It wasn't okay to be too good at something, it was bragging. It wasn't right to be too friendly to people, it was fake. It wasn't okay to be “too much” of anything, it invited retaliation. It was best to sit quietly and escape into other stories instead of fully engage in my own.

My relationship with books continued – and intensified – as I got older. In high school, I finished my lunch as quickly as I could and spent the rest of the period in the library. I didn't go to a single party until I was twenty years old; I preferred to stay home and read instead. Looking back on my adolescence, I mark periods of time by the books I was reading, in the way others mark periods of time by events and relationships. Jon Ostrosky unexpectedly flirted with me the week I was reading A Ring of Endless Light. Alison got her first boyfriend when I first discovered JD Salinger. My brother was in that really bad car accident when I was on my fifth

read of The Bell Jar. I got into theatre the same semester I got into Emily Brontë. Books were my compass, my comfort; if I had a book to read in the corner, I didn't have to interact with whatever was going on in the middle of the room. If I didn't have to interact, I couldn't get hurt.

When I moved to Austin for graduate school, my apartment was much smaller than I'd anticipated. There wasn't enough room for all my things, all my books. My mom tried to convince me to send a box or two back home with her and my dad. Overwhelmed by the magnitude of this move and horrified at the thought of being separated from even more familiar things, I burst into tears and shrieked, "You don't *understand!* My books are my *friends!*" She dropped the subject. The books stayed.

I read so much, so often, for so many reasons; over time, all these stories and all these voices created a collage of influences inside me. Looking back, it was inevitable that as I started creating my own work, I'd use other works as my bedrock. The first piece of creative writing I ever put into the world was fanfiction, which is by definition a piece of fiction written by fans of a TV series, movie, book, etcetera, using existing characters and situations to develop new plots. While I grew beyond the confines of fanfiction, I continued to use existing work as inspiration. The more influences I accumulated, the more the lines blurred between where they ended and I began. In this way, I've always been using source material in the creation of myself as a human, as well as the work I create as an artist. Throughout these three years at UT Austin, I've seen my own work become source material for others. And I've seen myself become a fully essential piece of it all.

Lost Girl, the play I submitted to grad school, was directly influenced by an existing work, a book that meant so much to me: J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan. In one of my re-reads over the years, I asked myself a simple question I couldn't believe no one had asked before – *what happened to Wendy Darling after she returned home from Neverland?* In the original book, we find out in the last chapter that Wendy grew up and had children of her own, but her life between puberty and motherhood is left to the reader's imagination. I was in that in-between time myself when the idea struck me; I couldn't stop thinking about what Wendy would be like at my age. This was a story I wanted to tell. This was *Lost Girl*. In its growth from pre-Austin idea into a UT mainstage production during my third year of grad school, my work intersected directly with my own life for the first time. This play about Wendy Darling became somehow personal.

**2. It began slowly.
(beginnings and self)**

“1. Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a color. Suppose I were to speak this as though it were a confession; suppose I shredded my napkin as we spoke. *It began slowly. An appreciation, an affinity.*” Then, one day, it became more serious. Then (looking into an empty teacup, its bottom stained with thin brown excrement coiled into the shape of a seahorse) *it became somehow personal.*”

- Maggie Nelson, Bluets

I didn’t plan on spending seven years of my life writing a play about Wendy Darling. It started slowly. A series of monologues. An archive of memory, to work through a freshly broken heart.

I read Maggie Nelson’s Bluets in the June after finishing my first year at UT. It felt like falling in love. I never wanted to stop reading it, but I also kept needing to put it down and take walks, cry. As soon as I finished it, I read it again. It was a book-length obsession about the color blue, and I was, in turn, obsessed with the book. I remember riding in my car with my friend and collaborator, Cortney McEniry, later that same summer and telling her about it – about the way Nelson talks about color theory, the color blue in art and world history, and how her own personal narrative is woven in so slowly and steadily that eventually the two become indistinguishable.

“I love it when writers talk about this one hyper-specific thing but are actually talking about everything in the world and also talking about themselves,” I said to Cortney. “That blurring of lines, that insight! The poetry! Obsessed Girl philosophy is my favorite genre.”

Cortney looked back at me, a *Duh* look on her face. “You know that’s what you do, right? Like, that’s what *Lost Girl* already is. You are your own favorite genre.”

I came back to this genre again and again in my three years at UT, in the work I created and the work I ingested. The English class I took here was called “Feminism and Creative Nonfiction,” and it used this genre as a central pillar in our coursework. I started to see more concretely how integral creative women’s lives are in relationship to their writing. Whereas I once saw this braiding of life and work as a distraction from the point at hand, I now saw that it was just the opposite; I was able to understand complex narratives and dense information when it was shown through the lens of a life. I started to see myself and my work in the greater context of this work.

“When I was younger, I studied the men I was involved with so carefully that I saw or thought I saw what pain or limitation lay behind their sometimes crummy behavior. I found it too easy to forgive them, or rather to regard them with sympathy at my own expense. It was as though I saw the depths but not the surface, the causes but not the effect. Or them and not myself. I think we call that overidentification, and it’s common among women.”

- Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*

When I was twenty, I fell in love with a magical boy. (I didn’t know it then, but he wasn’t really magical. The only magic he had was the magic I projected onto him. *I* was the magic-maker; he was the immature slob in a windowless room. But it didn’t feel that way at the time.) It didn’t last long. It shouldn’t mean as much as it did. (As it does.) But it felt big and important and as if it spanned years. I thought about it, about him, all the time. I became frustrated with

how little overlap there was between my feelings and my reality. If its footprint was so little, why did it mean so much?

“He always liked the stories about him best.”

- Wendy Darling reflecting on Peter Pan in *Lost Girl*

My friend Sarah told me I had Wendy Darling Syndrome. I didn't know what that was. “You're always trying to save the little Lost Boys,” she explained, and I remember laughing, even though it felt painful and unfunny. I've always been really good at taking care of people, especially boys whom I perceive as needing my help. I've always been good at assigning myself value according to how much value they give me, how much I “help” them. That usually happened by making myself less important so they could feel more important. I thought about Wendy Darling a lot after Sarah's “diagnosis,” and I realized that I identified with Wendy in all kinds of ways. She was a caretaker, just like me, in service of lost boys. In Neverland, the land of forgetting, she was tasked with remembering the things no one else had time for: bedtime stories, taking medicine. How would that memory serve her – or ruin her – as she grew up? Would she remember every detail of her time with Peter the same way I remembered my own “magical” boy? Would she move on easily, or would those memories paralyze her? If Peter Pan stands for all the boys who won't grow up, Wendy Darling stands for all the girls who do and all the pain that goes along with it. Wendy's story is my story, and my story is the story of so many young women who create themselves in the shadow of other people, often men. I didn't realize this for a long time. I thought, as you do when you're young, that this ache was entirely mine. I will return to this.

That's when it occurred to me to use Wendy Darling Syndrome for good – I could use Wendy as a vehicle to tell my own story. I could make my story as big as it felt by putting it in the hands of characters who flew across the London sky and kissed on a pirate ship. I could do what I later loved so much about Maggie Nelson – I could tell my own story in conversation with something else. I could talk about Peter Pan as a way of talking about everything. I could get the audience on my side by telling a version of my story in the context of one they already knew. And so it turns out that *I* was the key to writing this play, which perhaps seems obvious (of course I was the key, we all hold the keys to our individual plays, otherwise anyone could write them) but it wasn't obvious to me. Not then.

I started writing *Lost Girl* by accumulating details, evidence. As a result of my undergraduate theatre training, I had put “real” stories with “natural” dialogue on a pedestal, and in all of my previous writing, I tried to write conversationally. *Lost Girl* was the first time I started writing heightened language. This impulse first came about independently and was tied to my ongoing emotional state – conversational language didn't feel appropriate for the flood of feelings inside me, the mythology I was creating around this boy who broke my heart. The series of monologues I first wrote all opened with “The first time I saw him...” because I thought if I could capture the beginning, if I could archive it all, I could work my way through to the end and reconcile myself with what actually happened. But the details of any experience as it actually happened often don't match how the experience *felt*, or how the experience then changes us. I continued to be frustrated with how to capture the gulf between reality and perception; I longed to conjure moments in a magnified way so that *feelings* were the core truth. When I was first generating these monologues, I was also reading contemporary playwrights such as Sarah Ruhl for the first

time. The plays in *The Clean House* collection made me see what language can do in plays in a completely new way – I had previously been exposed primarily to realism and plays centered around men. Plays driven by poetry and metaphor and women were entirely new and entirely captivating to me; they tapped into the theatricality of *feelings*. I was struck by how much magic could be contained in a single line of stage directions – *They fall in love. They fall in love some more. The world falls away*. When I revisited the book Peter Pan, I was surprised by how much it aligned with the style of theatrical writing I longed to make my own – J.M. Barrie’s writing was dreamy and highly poetic, rich in metaphor, often going on long tangents that had little to do with the story’s forward motion. Realizing that my impulses were actually in line with the long legacy of Peter and Wendy helped me trust my impulses and lean into them more deeply, which is something I’ve continued to lean into throughout my time at UT.

3. A spell. (time and memory)

“2. And so I fell in love with a color—in this case, the color blue—as if falling under a spell, a spell I fought to stay under and get out from under, in turns.”

- Maggie Nelson, Bluets

Lost Girl was my ticket into graduate school, which seems fitting; this play about a girl who struggled to get out of someone else’s shadow was my own way into the light. I didn’t plan on continuing work on *Lost Girl* when I got to UT. I didn’t feel like the play was finished by any stretch of the imagination, but I couldn’t begin to conceive of the work I needed to do to finish it. I didn’t know how to rewrite. Besides, I was here to write new plays, not revisit old ones. But Wendy Darling wouldn’t let me go. I fell in love with the UT undergraduates. I realized that the seeds of this play had been planted while I was their age, and I owed it to them and to my past-self to keep telling this story. The play was haunting me the same way Peter haunted Wendy. I made it my mission to produce the play in some capacity during my three-year program, the ideal production being on the mainstage in order to give the play the resources it needed to reach the maximum undergraduate audience. But in order to make this dream a reality, I couldn’t sit quietly in the corners of rooms as I had for most of my life. I had to learn to stand in the center of things and center myself in my narrative, to ask for what I wanted. I put together a series of workshops and readings, and in the fall of my second year, I pitched *Lost Girl* to the season selection committee. I spent hours on the pitch, writing it out again and again to get it in my bones, hitting all the Major Points I thought I needed to hit in order to make this committee of faculty members and students choose my play. One day Pirronne Yousefsadeh, a visiting directing professor with whom I’d developed a close relationship, asked if I’d like to practice my pitch on her, and I did. She only had one note for me: “You have to find yourself in that pitch. Lead with *you* – an anecdote or hook into how you started writing the play in the first place.” It

had been five years since I'd had the realization that I was the key to writing *Lost Girl*, but I'd lost sight of that knowledge. And still, in the writing of this very thesis, my advisor – Liz Engelman – had to ask again and again, “Where are *you* in all of this?” I have to constantly remind myself to remember where I've been and to be in conversation with my past self in order to keep moving forward. After all this time, it's still such a deeply-ingrained habit to sideline myself.

“Memory, even in the rest of us, is a shifting, fading, partial thing, a net that doesn't catch all the fish by any means and sometimes catches butterflies that don't exist.”

- Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*

Memories are the collision of past, present, and future. When we recall a memory, we're putting ourselves in a little time machine of feeling. Earlier drafts of *Lost Girl* always felt like they were floating around in terms of structure, not anchored to anything, which was perhaps a symptom of memory's intangible nature and how big of a role it plays in Wendy's life. There was no clear timeline, no logic to when the chorus came in or what prompted Wendy's monologues. While this floaty-ness reflected the play's thematic content, it didn't give the audience anything clear to follow. In my second year at UT, I established a device that grounded Wendy's memories in a visible metaphor: cardboard moving boxes. Wendy's Mother, worried about her daughter who can't seem to get unstuck, decides to turn Wendy's childhood room – The Nursery – into an office, effectively kicking Wendy out of the place she's come to so deeply identify with her Peter Pan experience.

It wasn't until after taking Steven Dietz's Time class here at UT, though, that I melded the device of the cardboard boxes with Wendy's need to find Peter. From the very first draft,

Wendy's main journey was to find Peter because of how deeply his memory lingered in her life. But I hadn't answered the question "Why *now*? Why didn't she try to find him five years ago, or five years from now?" The Nursery was where Wendy first met Peter; Wendy was so insistent on staying in that room because that was the only place Peter knew her to be. If she left The Nursery, Peter would have no way to find her – and so she had to find him. These cardboard boxes gave *Lost Girl* a visual ticking clock and rooted the play in something the audience could tangibly understand, but it also gave *me* tools to write Wendy's arc. I knew that by the time the last box is packed, Wendy needed to have moved on from Peter. I knew that she should resist the boxes at all costs, so that the action of her packing one would be an undeniable milestone in her journey. The boxes were an illustration of memory, an accumulation of history, a visual marker on the road of life. I showed this by establishing the importance of the Nursery and why Wendy felt the need to stay; I wanted it to be clear how much it meant when she made the decision to leave.

Around the time I established this device, my parents made the decision to sell our family home. The house and farm we built from the ground up – the woods – my memories – were being put into cardboard boxes. I took this event in my life and made it an event in *Lost Girl*, putting a piece of myself in the narrative. This ticking clock not only gave the play more of an ache, but also a focus, an urgency. Once again, putting myself front and center was the answer. One would think I'd have learned the significance of this lesson by now, but I don't think I'd fully comprehended what I was doing when I put the moving boxes into the play. In retrospect, I can see that this is the point in my process when my life and experience were fully converging with my impulses. This convergence would be key as I wrote other plays. I will return to this.

There was another convergence in *Lost Girl*, one I worked to theatricalize in a specific way – the convergence of Wendy’s memories with Wendy’s present life. I chose to make Wendy’s memories physical manifestations represented in a four-person female chorus. Wendy’s relationship to memory is too big to be contained in one body; I wanted there to be physical bodies around Wendy to show how real and omnipresent her memories have become. Memories have become Wendy’s wounds and her walls, keeping out the world at all costs. However, as the play moves on, the chorus takes the way we perceive them as physical beings and shifts into something else. A little over halfway through the play, Wendy finds out that other girls besides her also went to Neverland with Peter – in this moment, I wanted the audience to see the female chorus become actual girls with their own feelings and memories, not just extensions of Wendy’s. I wanted this shift to highlight how isolating Wendy’s memories have become, how high the walls had gotten. Because of how singular her experience *felt*, Wendy assumes that no one else could possibly understand, when in fact her experience is shared by so many.

This choral shift was important to me for many reasons. It varies the play stylistically, and it’s a turn in the play’s structure – we’ve previously only heard the women in the play (besides Wendy) speak in poetic monologues, but when they become girls with names and stories of their own, they speak in dialogue *with* Wendy. The most important reason for this shift, though, was to represent onstage what was happening to Wendy’s worldview. In this fantastical, poetic play, I wanted to show a moment mirroring my own real awakening to other women’s experiences, to my specific place in the stories we all share. I used to try to broaden the focus of my writing, because I assumed my focus was too narrow and must be somehow wrong – my

details weren't other peoples' details. But if there are countless other girls like me, girls who have been taught to "grow out of it" instead of lean into it, those same countless girls might be interested in what I have to say and find themselves in it. Maybe they wouldn't feel somehow wrong if there was someone speaking for and about them. And so I wanted to see Wendy have that same shift in consciousness – that same recognition of other experiences.

**4. I will try to explain this.
(likeability, impulse, and choruses)**

“How could all the shreds of blue garbage bags stuck in brambles, or the bright blue tarps flapping over every shanty and fish stand in the world, be, in essence, the fingerprints of God? *I will try to explain this.*

I admit that I may have been lonely. I know that loneliness can produce bolts of hot pain, a pain which, if it stays hot enough for long enough, can begin to simulate, or to provoke—take your pick—an apprehension of the divine. (*This ought to arouse our suspicions.*)”

- Maggie Nelson, Bluets

Focusing on a young woman’s pain and self-destruction is a difficult thing to do, for many reasons. It’s not something a lot of people like to engage with. For every undergraduate who gushed to me that they loved this play because they “were” Wendy, I received just as many furrowed brows and questions about Wendy’s “likeability.” *Do you want us to like her?* This question was always asked with a clear implication that the person asking did *not*, in fact, like Wendy. This question was almost always asked by men. I had a hard time with this question, because I *love* Wendy and I want everyone else to love her. I knew I was right, and I had a deep desire to explain to everyone who disagreed with me why they were wrong. (This is perhaps not the best part of me. It’s a part of me, though, that is deeply like Wendy. We both become obsessed with people or ideas and need to articulate *exactly why*.) Wendy infuriates me and she frustrates me; she’s selfish and sad. That’s exactly *why* I love her, because of how maddeningly human she is, but those are the same qualities many people cited as why they *didn’t* like her. I was getting consistently positive feedback from my target undergraduate audience for the play, but I wanted the play to have an even broader reach. Although stories about young women might not be for everyone, they’re certainly for more people than just young women. I worked to address some aspects of the likeability question within the play and to implement them into rewrites, but I stuck largely to my impulses. I didn’t want to get spooked by handful of opinions

and take away the very things that I loved about the play. A less well-behaved version of me wanted to give a middle finger to every person who asked questions about Wendy's likeability and dig in my heels even deeper into the things that turned people off. What does it mean to be "unlikeable," especially as a woman – especially as a *young* woman? Does it mean you are actually not able to be liked? Or does it mean you're complicated and sometimes unpleasant? Does it mean that you exist as who you are, flaws and all, instead of who other people want you to be? I was hungry to go into a new process with these questions in my head as I generated new material, instead of trying to answer these questions in response to something that already existed.

When playwright Annie Baker visited in the spring semester of my second year, she said that she almost always hates whichever play she just finished and actively tries to fix her perceived mistakes when going into writing the *next* play. With *The Flick*, she didn't like how it came to be "About" something tangible, centering around a topical conflict that was easily described and understood. She said she wanted her plays to feel more "slippery." And so when she set out to write her next play, *John*, she actively avoided any kind of concrete narrative that was issue-related or too easy for the audience to intellectually grasp. I was a semester and a half into writing *Gondal* when Annie was here, and while I was still grappling with *Lost Girl* rewrites, I started keeping a running mental list of things to try, or deepen, as I moved from the world of Wendy Darling into the darker trio of Kimberly, Emily, and Lainey. In writing *John*, Annie told us that she leaned into choices that "felt" right instead of trying to make things make any sort of sense. She spoke specifically about an onstage clock that one of the characters wound to a particular time at the top of every scene – her director and other collaborators continually

questioned her intention surrounding that choice. *I don't know*, she'd say. *It just feels right. I can't explain it. But it's very, very important.* Annie was after a slipperiness that was slippery even to her, the playwright in charge of authoring the world. I felt such relief in hearing this Pulitzer Prize-winning hero of mine talk about chasing her impulses and staying true to them even in the face of scrutiny and doubt. I made it my goal to stick close to my impulses in *Gondal* – not to be precious with them, but to let them lead the way. I also wanted to get better at trusting my feelings and impulses, *then* learning to articulate them, instead of pressuring myself to articulate them early as a test I was setting myself up to fail. As a part of my time in graduate school, I've gotten much better at articulating myself and my intentions. However, this has sometimes resulted in my falling into the trap of thinking that if I *can't* articulate something, it's not worth pursuing. *It just feels right* doesn't often feel like an acceptable defense (and it's *not* when it becomes the *habitual* defense). There's a line between using a "feeling" as a cop-out default reply, versus knowing when to trust a feeling and let it lead the way. I'm still working to find that line; it changes in every process.

In *Lost Girl's* development, I often wrestled with how to articulate my intention surrounding the play's chorus. It felt right to have one, and I wanted to trust that feeling. But my inarticulateness led to inaction, and instead of interrogating my impulse, I never made a clear choice. As a result, the chorus struggled to find its footing. Sometimes they felt like the play's engine, a steady presence driving the story forward, and other times they made the play spin its wheels, stuck in park. If the chorus comes in too often and/or stays for too long, they stall the play's momentum and split our focus; if they come in too little, they don't have time to do their work. However, it became clear that the chorus had *too* much time to do their work, and perhaps

too much overall work to do. There were two different choruses operating in *Lost Girl*, as I defined in the previous section: the external mixed-gender chorus commenting on Wendy's journey, and the internal female chorus reflecting Wendy's feelings and memory. I wanted the external chorus to illuminate Wendy in a new way – by giving us new information about her, moving her story along, or reversing what we thought we knew about her. I also wanted them to help accelerate the play's pace. Since Wendy's world alone is largely stagnant, this chorus provides necessary disruption. I wanted to illustrate the contrast between internal and external time by switching between the long, denser Wendy monologues and the short, clipped back-and-forth of the chorus. However, the internal female chorus shared the same pace and density of language as Wendy, and the combination overpowered the rest of the play as a result. The fact that the non-Wendy female characters *also* took part in the external chorus further muddled their role and the overall role of the chorus. I still feel like a chorus must be part of *Lost Girl*; there's something about the mythic quality of Peter Pan, how we've filtered it through our cultural consciousness into hundreds of variations on the story, which calls for a collection of voices to move us through the story of Wendy Darling. But the specific work of *Lost Girl*'s chorus is something I will continue to grapple with as I move forward.

Like *Lost Girl*, *Gondal* originally had several different choral systems. I wrote into the play a non-speaking, movement-based chorus that existed for several drafts, which I cut before ever fully incorporating into the play. I wrote this chorus with the intention of using movement as a counterpoint to the denser sections of text, to illuminate and illustrate elements of the Kimberly monologues, to aid in transitions. However, I realized that this was creating yet another system outside of the existing ones I'd already created. If I needed movement and

transitions in *Gondal*, those could and should come from the Brontë and contemporary worlds –a stronger storytelling gesture in relation to the interconnectivity of the play’s three storylines. I also hoped to use this interconnectivity to prime the audiences for Kimberly’s role in *Gondal*, her creation and control of the worlds within the play. In line with this intention, I started incorporating moments of transition that hinted at a larger web between these seemingly-isolated stories. At the top of the Skateland scene, for example, I wrote a stage direction that reads, “*Kimberly refills a bowl of chips.*” At this point in the play, Kimberly hadn’t interacted directly with the contemporary storyline. With Kimberly aiding in the set-up of this birthday party, I wanted to signal to the audience that she was more involved than she initially seemed. If I had kept the movement chorus and they, instead of Kimberly, had been instrumental in this transition, there would be no opportunity to visually connect the relationship between the worlds. These inter-world transitions were something we deepened in production, and as I go back to script revisions, I want to continue exploring the specificity of these moments.

There was also originally a chorus of disembodied male voices in *Gondal*: the same actor voicing Patrick Brontë (the Brontë family patriarch), Mr. Randall (a high school guidance counselor), and a skate rink DJ. These voices were all associated with voices of authority and served to highlight both the oppression and the isolation of *Gondal*’s young women in a male-dominated world. By taking out these unseen men, the two male characters in the play became more essential. I expanded Branwell’s storyline, centering it around a major heartbreak and subsequent descent that mirrored some of the language in Kimberly’s flood monologue. Branwell’s place in the play had been unclear to me for a long time, and his connection to Kimberly was a late discovery once she became more central to the play. At first, Branwell

wasn't a character in *Gondal* at all. Then I rewrote the Brontë storylines to include him, but he was closer to Charlotte than Emily and felt inconsequential to the action. I realized that in order to earn his place in the play, Branwell needed to be in relationship to both Emily *and* Kimberly. His heartbreak is what ties him to Kimberly; it also needs to break Emily's heart and be, in many ways, her final straw. If Branwell is the only person who understands Emily, his undoing would leave her all alone in the world. This is what then drives Emily further into the arms of fantasy and violence, of Slender Man. This discovery became a good rule of thumb in my rewrites – each supporting character should directly impact either Emily or Lainey, and each of them should have a deeper symbolic tie to Kimberly. Luke had previously been a peripheral character who didn't do much work outside of the Skateland scene. I changed two things about this scene in order to deepen Luke's work in the play. First, I moved Kimberly's monologue about heartbreak and natural disasters up in sequence so that she enters when Luke exits with Amber. Lainey is left alone, heartbroken, and Kimberly sits down beside her to reflect on her own formative heartbreak. It's also the first time in the play that Kimberly has a monologue in the middle of a scene, as the Skateland scene continues when her monologue ends. That moment then became bigger than Lainey, bigger than Luke. The second thing I changed was Luke's work *after* the scene. In earlier drafts, Luke all but disappears from the play, but I decided to deepen his relationship with Amber, making them an official couple. This served as a further point of isolation in Lainey's friendship with Amber, and as a constant reminder of what happened at Skateland. Making these shifts from offstage male voices to fully-formed male supporting characters taught me how much more active a choice is when I *put it onstage*. And centering Kimberly in the play is what helped me realize the work each character needed to do.

**5. Why not go away?
(inaction, monologues, and language)**

**“She said,
When you see these horrible images why do you stay with them?
Why keep watching? Why not**

**go away? I was amazed.
Go away where? I said.
This still seems to me a good question.”**

- Anne Carson, *The Glass Essay*

A key that unlocked much of *Gondal* for me – including the need to put Kimberly at the center of the play – was reading Anne Carson’s *The Glass Essay*. (I will return to this, the hows and the whys.) I read it three months after I read Bluets, and it cemented all the work Maggie Nelson had begun to make me value the insertion of self into a book-length obsession. Or in my case, a play-length obsession.

I’m an obsessive person. I get consumed by things, by people, and I often become overwhelmed with their influence and have a hard time separating myself, which leads to inaction. I struggle with this in my work, in my life. With this very thesis, I had a hard time writing in an active way. (I probably still am.) My impulse is instead always toward reflection, analysis, description. I am a head-dwelling woman and I want to see plays about other head-dwelling women – “passive” women – but I struggle to marry this desire to an audience’s desire for action they can see, progress they can track. I want to test the limits of emotional endurance and do nothing but sit in language, in non-action, for a while. Can this happen for longer than an audience is comfortable with? Can I reconcile myself with their discomfort? There’s never a non-active moment inside my head – how can I dramatize this inner action? Language is my

favorite element of storytelling, and language for me is tied to feeling. Both *Gondal* and *Lost Girl* have a single female voice in their center, protagonists who deliver long, direct address monologues about their lives and their feelings. Wendy's monologues need to be told through heightened language, because her feelings are so much bigger than herself. The pattern and repetition of Wendy's monologues, however, sometimes became stagnant, a tendency also tied in this case to feeling. Wendy is Sad with a capital S, and sadness is a paralyzing emotion. Depression often leads to stagnation and repetition. This is a connection that makes sense intellectually and pleases me greatly on the page; on the stage, however, these monologues sometimes felt like they were stalling the play. Kimberly's monologues in *Gondal* were also tied to feeling – to anger, and I found that anger is more observably active than sadness. It isn't intellectual, it's instinctive. (I will come back to anger, to its roots in my life.) A lot can be *done* with anger, while the only thing to be done with sadness is finding ways to make it go away. Throughout *Gondal*'s development, I was determined to make Kimberly's monologues active, and found her anger to be the key.

Much of my work on *Gondal*'s monologues stemmed from lessons I learned during *Lost Girl*. Namely, what is the need? Why is this character addressing the audience? Why is she revealing so much? What is the arc of these monologues within the greater arc of the play? In *Lost Girl*, I'm *still* not entirely sure who the audience is to Wendy and why she's confiding in them. Wendy's monologues also don't change anything within the world of the play – only within herself. This lessened their impact. I worked to learn from this and make Kimberly's monologues in *Gondal* start from a place specific to her but build toward a climactic convergence of worlds. Kimberly's language and relationship with the audience shifted

throughout the arc of those monologues, from information to secret to story to warning – when Kimberly reveals that she is the playwright, the structure and language systems of the play as we know it break down and become something else. It's the last time Kimberly says more than three sentences of dialogue in a row. For the rest of the play, Lainey and Emily begin to share Kimberly's words. It's a clear distinction that diverges from the shared-language system within *Lost Girl*, where the female chorus shares Wendy's language but also the language of the external chorus, and there's not a clear point where or intentional reason why this sharing ends. Another language lesson I learned from *Lost Girl* that I didn't implement as successfully into *Gondal* is length and recurrence of monologues. I cut the Kimberly monologues significantly – striking three of them entirely, and cutting the rest down. My intention while cutting the monologues was to adhere to two rules I made for myself: I would cut for motion and for connection to other systems in the play – a larger metaphor or event within one of the other worlds. This helped in terms of how the monologues formed a cohesive narrative and connected to the rest of the play, but as rest of the play shrunk, the remaining monologues took up a greater percentage of the play. This led to them falling into some of the same traps as Wendy's *Lost Girl* monologues: they stalled the play and disrupted momentum. In the future, I want to think more about how the play is moving rhythmically in addition to its relationship with motion and theme.

I also took what I learned from *Lost Girl* in terms of what invites the audience to lean forward instead of disengage; it has everything to do with the character/audience relationship. In *Gondal*, I started wrestling with this dynamic earlier in the process and in much more detail. Kimberly is explicitly the playwright of *Gondal*. She controls the worlds of the play. Because the play is so sprawling and seemingly unconnected at first, I wanted Kimberly's direct address to

the audience to signal to them that they were in capable hands on this wild ride. They might not know how the Brontë sisters relate to Slender Man, but this one character is looking them in the eye and telling them stories, so she'll probably tell them what's going on eventually. And she does. When she eventually does, though, their understanding of her has shifted. They're not so sure her hands are capable anymore – she's in control of the play, and she's taking it to dark and dangerous places instead of steering it to safety. I was really interested in playing with the idea of an unreliable narrator and bringing that back to what Kimberly needs from the audience.

Kimberly talks a lot about wanting to find someone, to be seen, and here she is with an audience full of people finally seeing her. Now that she's being seen, the question needed to become more about what she will *do*.

**6. Which I mean to confront.
(fear and transformation)**

“I travel all day on trains and bring a lot of books—

**some for my mother, some for me
including *The Collected Works Of Emily Brontë*.
This is my favourite author.**

**Also my main fear, which I mean to confront.
Whenever I visit my mother
I feel I am turning into Emily Brontë,**

**my lonely life around me like a moor,
my ungainly body stumping over the mud flats with a look of transformation
that dies when I come in the kitchen door.”**

- Anne Carson, *The Glass Essay*

Emily Brontë is one in a long line of women writers I love – brilliant women who have self-destructed in various ways. It’s become a cliché, hasn’t it? The Sad Girl. The Destructive Creator. She burns too bright to burn for too long; she takes everything personally and can’t seem to maintain existing in the world. She either isolates herself and gives up on attempting connection with other people (the Emilys Brontë and Dickinson), or she is suffocated by societal pressures and succumbs to darkness (Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath).

I’ve always identified with this particular cliché, because like all clichés, it’s rooted in truth. We can’t deny that these women are recurring figures in literature and history; we can’t deny the overlaps between their work and their lives. I recognized that cliché’s underlying truth in myself, and it scared me. The kind of work I want to make is the kind of work these women make; the kind of person I am is the kind of people they were. That excites me – maybe I’ll

create something as good as theirs. That scares me – maybe I'll destroy myself in the process. Is self-destruction worth the work that comes out of it?

"I'm afraid of both of you. Becoming you. Not becoming you."

- Kimberly to Emily and Lainey, *Gondal*

I've had anxiety for as long as I can remember, before I knew what it was. A careful indoor cat of a girl, I've spent and continue to spend a lot of time cataloguing possibility – that is to say, planning for the worst and the best and the in-between and living so fully in those possibilities that the actual present disappears. When it comes back into focus, I'm always surprised and unprepared and scared all over again. I'm simultaneously three steps ahead and two steps behind. There are days when the fear is a low throbbing, and there are days when it is debilitating. But it's always there.

Growing up, I never called this feeling by its name. It didn't even occur to me that it had a name. I come from a family of Southern farmers, people of the earth who don't believe in things like mental illness – how can you believe in something you can't see (of course, that's the entire basis of the Christian faith that my upbringing was steeped in, but the nature of that divide is another thesis altogether)? Instead of working through my fear, I bottled it up and fought it by being high-achieving – there couldn't be anything wrong with me if I did everything I was supposed to, when I was supposed to do it. I was the model of a Good Southern Girl.

In *Lost Girl*, Wendy is paralyzed with fear. She lives in a past experience and relationship with an absent boy in order to avoid living in the present. She's afraid of forgetting her past, which makes her afraid of existing in the present or moving forward into the future. She engages with fear by denying it, burying it. My goal was to make fear one of the primary systems in the play while refusing to directly address it until the very end; in this way, the acknowledgment of fear becomes a part of Wendy's self-discovery. Wendy spends the majority of the play insisting that she's *not* afraid, even as her friends and family observe her fear and try to move her toward some action against it. She denies them – and herself – at every turn, until the very last scene. In earlier drafts of the play, Peter was yet another person who calls Wendy out on her pervasive fear, and then “teaches” her that fear is a fundamental human struggle. As I rewrote the play to make Wendy more central in her own self-discovery, it didn't sit well with me that Peter became the center of the ending. And so I took Peter's words and adapted them for Wendy's mouth. Right as she and Peter are about to kiss, Wendy admits that she “gets scared.” Peter tells her that he does too, and to “just pretend you're not.” After hearing affirmation for what she's been doing the entire play, Wendy rejects it. She tells Peter no, she won't pretend. Instead, she says, “I think it's okay to be scared.” In this last scene, I wanted two things to happen that seem to contradict one another: for Peter and Wendy to kiss, and for Wendy to close the Nursery window in a symbolic act of moving on. Wendy's fear is a central and driving force in the play; in order to truly believe she's ready to move on, I knew we needed to see her face this mythical, magical boy, kiss him one more time, and recognize that it's not what she wants or needs. The kiss is a gift, a goodbye.

Lost Girl uses fear primarily as a character trait and a moral of sorts (for lack of a better word), whereas in *Gondal*, fear exists both inside and outside of the characters – Slender Man creates an external visual representation of fear, while the characters discuss their internal fears. Earlier drafts of *Gondal* dwelled more on the loneliness of its women, but about a year into the play’s development, I chose to steer away from the impulse to make loneliness an explicit central player. This decision was rooted in lessons learned from *Lost Girl*, things I wanted to separate myself from. I was fighting against *Lost Girl*’s passivity around Wendy’s loneliness, which functioned much like her fear and her sadness – it paralyzed her. She defined herself by its ache. In *Gondal*, I wanted the central trio’s loneliness to launch them into action. Their action, much like Wendy’s inaction, is rooted in fear – here, it’s their need to take their fear and transform it, master it, become it. The world and its inhabitants have made them all too aware of their Too Muchness, and subsequently they have become afraid of themselves. Their intensity scares people away, and so they’ve taught themselves to suppress it. Years of containing it have only made it fester. The play itself began as a Too Muchness that I tried to suppress – it seemed unfeasible to me that all the things I wanted to write about could be contained in a single play. This process was scary to me, and my own fear fed the fear in the play.

“Sometimes I scare me.”

- Kimberly, *Gondal*

We don’t realize the nature or depth of Kimberly’s fear for a while. Her monologues deal largely with loss, heartbreak, and legacy; I intend for them to serve as a well-articulated counterpoint to the dialogue-driven scenes of the two different worlds. Kimberly’s function in

the play is partly to scare the audience, to manipulate them. I wanted her to draw the audience in with beautiful language and heartbreaking stories and secrets that make them feel special to receive. We're not sure what the monologues are leading to, and that's the point. Kimberly reveals who she is two-thirds into the play – the very person who wrote what the audience is watching. It's in this monologue that Kimberly divulges her fear: herself. My intention with the earlier monologues was to lay the groundwork for this reveal. It seemed at the time that these speeches were unrelated to Kimberly's fear, but I want them in retrospect to seem like the root of it. *I'm afraid because I won't have a place to call my own. I'm afraid I won't find someone to share my life with. I'm afraid of my refusal to ask for help when I'm in pain. I'm afraid of love, because it broke me. I'm afraid of what the brokenness left behind. I'm afraid of my family legacy. I'm afraid of the stories I tell. I'm afraid of myself.* All of Kimberly's fears are emotional and existential ones; common fears elude her. In one monologue, she talks about her brother's fear of snakes and where that fear started – he was traumatized from when they were young and their father killed a rattlesnake in front of them. Kimberly's reaction to the experience was a far different one. She doesn't remember the trauma, only the steps taken to survive:

"I can't quite articulate what I learned that day, but it was something far from fear. It was something more along the lines of: You take the metal shovel from the back of the truck and you do whatever you need to do with it and you do it quickly and you use force and you do not flinch and you do not cry and you get behind the wheel and you drive away."

This is the first time in the play Kimberly mentions fear at all. I want the audience to know in that moment how active fear is and will be in *Gondal*. Fear won't be a looming dread in this play; it will be a central character. It will enact change. The next time Kimberly mentions

fear is when she says that she's afraid of herself. In that moment, I want the audience to remember the snake and the metal shovel. I want them to anticipate that another act of destruction is coming, that the source of fear must be destroyed. Since Kimberly is the source of her own fear, she must destroy herself, which is why her transformation into Slender Man is essential – she becomes a thing to incite fear in others. After this transformation, Kimberly doesn't have any more monologues. If the earlier monologues function as ruminations of Kimberly's fear, once she *becomes* the fear, I intended for these words to then turn into action. As Kimberly turns toward action, so do Lainey and Emily, because I wrote them to be the most direct extensions of Kimberly. However, since Kimberly wrote the play, I want every character to reflect her in some way. Toward the end of the play, I wrote a long monologue for Anne Brontë, the character who previously had the least amount of lines. The monologue is a litany of Anne's various fears, which starts with "things that rot" and ends with "everything." I want this moment to be a reminder of Kimberly's fear, how consuming it is, how drastically she must change to escape it. Anne's monologue is only a page before Kimberly encourages Lainey to stab her friend and Emily to eat her own work, before Kimberly sets fire to her childhood home. I want all of these acts to connect back to the snake-killing monologue – all three women learn to destroy what scares them. In Dietz's first year workshop, we did an exercise in which we wrote a five-line monologue, and the goal was to travel as far as possible in those lines. I had this exercise in mind as I worked on *Gondal*, as I traveled the distance between Anne Brontë's fear of the world and these three climactic acts of violence.

**7. The little raw soul.
(process and self)**

**“But in between the neighbour who recalls her
coming in from a walk on the moors
with her face “lit up by a divine light”**

**and the sister who tells us
Emily never made a friend in her life,
is a space where the little raw soul**

**slips through.
It goes skimming the deep keel like a storm petrel,
out of sight.**

The little raw soul was caught by no one.”
- Anne Carson, *The Glass Essay*

I went to Liz Engelman at the beginning of my second year with several ideas for the play I would write in her workshop – the Brontë sisters! Slender Man! Teenage girls (again! but different!)? Oppressive religion! Mass hysteria! Where on earth could I possibly begin? “I think these all live in the same play,” Liz said, and I thought she was insane for about two minutes, until I realized she was right. Then *I* felt insane. I thought I was going to write a play I knew how to write. It was my second year of graduate school, after all – I’d been through the Dietz workshop and had all the tools. This was supposed to be the time I wrote something Good and Polished and showed everyone what a good student I was and how much I’d learned. This mindset was quickly upended.

“I so often feel like if I bring in pages for workshop, they have to be polished and orderly and fit into the play immediately. But when Gia started 381 Bleecker in Kirk’s spring workshop, she wrote with abandon, always bringing in pages – they didn’t always seem to relate directly to the play or advance the plot, but they built this world with mountains of detail and vast backstory. I remember being astounded at the sheer volume of pages she accumulated; it read more like an experimental novel than a play at times. Gia herself didn’t know what form the play would eventually take at the end of the semester. But then summer happened, and somewhere in those

three and a half months, she made one of the best plays I've heard in quite a long time. And the magical thing was, you could feel every single detail from her workshop pages in the play that emerged. There was not a wasted week in that process, even when it was ten pages of free-writing or list-making. I forget that. I feel like I have to get through that kind of writing in order to get to the thing I want to write, when in fact, that is the thing. IT IS ALL THE THING.

It inspired me and moved me to see the product of a true process. This play I'm writing is going to be big and wild and instead of trying to tame it before I've even begun, I need to let it run around and be free for a while. I'm going to start writing more without worrying if what I'm writing is "workshop-worthy" or the play I want to write at all. I've just got to start accumulating more pages."

- Kimberly Belflower, Playwriting Workshop Journal, September 2015.

Gondal started out intentionally raw – I didn't plan or overthink anything during the play's initial generation. I just tried to accumulate anything and everything that felt interesting or relevant. This rawness and accumulation then came to suit the needs of the story and characters as I generated more material throughout the semester, and I was able to see the immediate effect of process influencing content and form. As my weekly process became wilder, so did the pages I generated. I let my attention and imagination run as fast as it could in all directions, and when I did, I found and collected all kinds of new inspiration that made it into the work, regardless of whether I knew how it fit yet. This part of writing *Gondal* taught me to work for process over product, which is something I'd previously said I valued, but never truly practiced.

I've been fascinated by the Brontë sisters – Emily, Charlotte, and Anne – since high school, when I first read Wuthering Heights and wrote a paper twice the page limit defending Heathcliff as a hero. But this fascination was reborn when the Brontës, and Emily in particular, became a specific point of reference in *Teen Girl FANTasies*, a play about teenage girls and the internet that I co-wrote with Megan Tabague in my first year at UT. One of the characters is an

aspiring writer who uses the Brontë canon as models for her own stories. The intensity of the Brontës' loneliness, isolation, and passion made them fit naturally into the teenage experience of any era. I started doing research about them for my own pleasure, and the fascination spun into obsession. The three sisters felt like my spiritual companions when I was a teenager first encountering their work – wildness and longing saturated every page in a way that spoke to everything I was feeling and trying to keep inside. As I came to learn more about the three sisters, I realized that together, they represent the entire spectrum of who I am. Anne, the meek baby of the family, always trying to do what's right and please those around her. Charlotte, the hyper-productive, boy-crazy caretaker. And Emily, the independent, withdrawn, wild one.

In *Gondal*, Emily Brontë struggles to make herself fit in a world that has no Emily-shaped space in it. Her world and its rules are narrow rooms, and she contains entire landscapes. I was interested at tackling this famous literary figure and tracing her legacy backward to where it began. Shockingly little is actually known about Emily Brontë outside of her limited body of work and secondhand information from family records. I needed the characters Lainey and Kimberly to help illuminate Emily Brontë. I needed them to help me let go of Emily as a real person, to make her into the character I needed her to be. But before I got to the point of needing to let go, I had to accumulate enough information. I wanted to revisit my teenage Brontë obsession through the lens of my grad school self.

Liz ran her workshop nontraditionally. Instead of bringing in five to ten pages a week, a model I was used to, each playwright had four one-hour shares throughout the semester. We could use those four hours however we saw fit – the time was assumed to include reading pages

from the play aloud, but it could also include outside reading, discussion, storyboarding, field trips, etcetera. I gave myself permission to take full advantage of this freedom. During my first year of grad school, I didn't read many books. I mentioned this to my professors at my end-of-semester chat; I said that in an ideal world, I'd read more, but then I quickly shrugged off this desire: "There just hasn't been time! Besides, I'm here to write plays, not read books! And that's okay!" I don't know if I expected a pat on the back for what I perceived to be Sacrifice in the name of Hard Work, but I was given the opposite. Steven told me, gently but firmly, that the world's best athletes have to feed their bodies the right kinds and amounts of food in order to perform at their best. "And *you* are an athlete of the mind and heart. What are you feeding yourself?" he asked. I thought about this at the beginning of Liz's workshop, about what I wanted to make, and what I would need to feed myself in order to make it. I thought of my adolescent self, forming herself through a bag full of books. I went to the bookstore and came home with a stack of ten books by and about the Brontë family, and various volumes of poetry; I settled in to read and explore.

This play has been feeling very wild and big and out of my grasp – which, of course, is exactly the feelings that this play is about, so maybe it's only fitting. Talking through some of my ideas and connections with the class on Thursday was helpful in that it made me feel less crazy and isolated in this mania, but it also made me more overwhelmed than ever by the potential scope of this thing.

I've been mostly reading and longhand free-writing this week. Making slow but steady progress in the Bronte biography. Most of my free-writing has been in the realm of monologues and kind of verse-dialogue-poetry that stems from parallels between both worlds – phrases and images that repeat, scenes that have a similar need, big ideas that connect to both worlds, etc.

- Kimberly Belflower, Playwriting Workshop Journal, September 2015

After the Brontë-inspired fanfiction of *Teen Girl FANTasies*, several people recommended that I read Anne Carson's *The Glass Essay*. All I knew was that it was semi-about Emily Brontë and that I'd read a few of Carson's other books and loved them. The essay fell off my radar until the fall of second year – as I struggled to find my footing in this wild play, I took a break from writing one week and read *The Glass Essay* instead, and thank goodness I did, because it was akin to a spiritual experience. I had never encountered anything that was so *much* all at once – an academic essay about the life of Emily Brontë, a highly metaphoric narrative of heartbreak and independence, a mother-daughter story, a poem – and all of it felt exact and essential. If you remove one element of the piece, the whole thing unravels. It inspired me to put more of myself into *Gondal*, more of my research, more of my guts. I began to embrace more elements to make a complicated and essential whole – more storylines, more language systems. I knew from the start that I was writing a big play, but I thought it was at least one that was neatly ordered into two separate parts that I could outline and fill in accordingly. But in this encounter with *The Glass Essay* and the weeks that followed, the play took the wheel and steered me so off course I didn't even recognize what I was writing. I first thought this was a bad thing and tried to regain control, but then I started to realize that the play is about wild women and that their wildness needed to be reflected in the way the play was presenting itself. I started exploring different ways of writing that didn't involve writing at all – watching movies, looking at books of paintings, reading poetry and biographies – and then having marathon writing days where I just let everything I'd been ingesting cascade out of me in whatever ways. I didn't edit. If I stopped knowing what happened in a scene, I stopped writing that scene but left the half-scene in as a bridge to something else. This process reminded me that I need to find a personal way into a story in order to see the bigger picture, which was something I'd lost sight of in my research. As

a part of this scattershot process, I started writing about myself in indirect relationship to the play's characters and ideas – for example, I started writing about my relationship with my childhood home as a way of leaning into Emily Brontë's codependent connection with her home. I called these personal writings “vomit-piles,” and I didn't anticipate they would ever be read aloud or end up in *Gondal* at all, let alone become one of the play's central pillars. But it turns out these vomit-piles would become monologues that would unlock the entire play. It turns out I was just getting started.

“Writing is saying to no one and to everyone the things it is not possible to say to someone.”

- Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby

I wrote the first of what would become the Kimberly monologues on an airplane, longhand in my notebook. I was traveling to Las Vegas, to be a bridesmaid – one of my best friends from college was getting married. I met her when I was twenty, around the time I met the boy I used to love. This boy had been invited to the wedding, but I didn't know if he was going. I pretended I was okay with this not-knowing; I wasn't. My stomach felt like it was collapsing in on itself as I thought about him, as I sat in classes the week leading up to the wedding, as I walked through the airport the day before, and this infuriated me. I planned to work on concrete assignments while on the plane, things with progress I could track. Instead, a metaphor, fully formed, popped into my head. It was one of those rare, glorious moments when I didn't know where the idea was leading, but I knew it was a Good Idea. It was a metaphor about hearts and heartbreak made manifest as physical places and natural disasters. I started writing frantically, trying to chase the thought as far as it would take me. I began generally, explaining what I meant

by this metaphorical connection. As I kept writing, it became more specific, more about him. More about me. I wrote nonstop for over an hour; I got off the plane in a haze. He didn't come to the wedding.

First-year Kimberly would have never brought that piece of writing into a workshop the next week. *It has nothing to do with the play*, she'd think. *It's not even a play, it's more like an essay. Plus, it's too personal.* But second-year Kimberly, emboldened and inspired by Anne Carson, stuck it in between a scene with two teenage girls talking about periods and a sermon from Patrick Brontë. Second-year Kimberly brought this monologue-essay into class.

I don't know what I expected from hearing that monologue/essay/x-ray of my heart out loud. I think I was nervous about what little material I'd generated compared to some of my peers. I think I needed to hear those words out loud as a sort of exorcism. I think I needed to hear if other people had ever felt the same way. Yes, as it turns out. They had. As I learned in *Lost Girl*, writing from and about my own specific experience sometimes feels like I'm narrowing the scope of my story, but it's actually a way of accessing the universal. The more I leaned into this type of writing in *Gondal*, the more the play opened up. At the end of the semester, I had a very rough draft of the play; the essay-monologues were there, but they had no character speaking them. I felt in my gut that they belonged, I just didn't know how.

The next semester, I chose *Gondal* as my project in PDW – Professional Development Workshop – a class taken by all the second-years and collaborators of our choosing. Toward the end of the semester, we each choose a guest artist to come and workshop our projects in various

ways. Throughout the semester, I experimented with different characters reading the monologue-essays. I thought that would help illuminate the their connection to the play at large, but it never felt right. I started to second-guess my gut and think that maybe the monologues didn't belong in the play after all. Then I met Joy Meads, my PDW guest artist, and while I hadn't yet expressed my uncertainty surrounding the monologues, within twenty minutes of our first *Gondal* conversation, Joy looked me in the eye and said, "A lot of people might try and tell you that these monologues don't belong in the play. Those people are wrong. Those people fundamentally misunderstand your play. I don't know *how* the monologues work yet, but that's okay. We'll figure it out." I nearly wept. Here was this amazing, prominent woman in my field, telling me that my gut was right, that she understood what I was after. Even if neither of us could articulate it yet, she understood.

Throughout the rest of my workshop weekend with Joy, I made big rewrites and big discoveries. The day before my in-class presentation, after a four-hour rehearsal and subsequent margarita-dramaturgy, Joy said, "Can I ask you a personal question?" When I said yes, she continued, "These monologues – they're you, right? They're from your life?" Again, I said yes. Joy nodded. "I thought so. And I also think there's power in *owning* that, in *naming* yourself." I had a similar reaction this as I did to Liz Engelman's initial *I think this is all one play* – I thought Joy was wrong, then I immediately realized she was right. The play had always been about me in conversation with myself, my obsessions. By naming myself as a character, I could go deeper and get more specific.

**8. Too much.
(adolescence and anger)**

**“You remember too much,
my mother said to me recently.**

**Why hold onto all that? And I said,
Where can I put it down?
She shifted to a question about airports.”**

- Anne Carson, *The Glass Essay*

Kimberly, Emily, and Lainey are characters who exist in “too much” – too loud, too quiet, too sensitive, too weird, with too many feelings. They dream of finding a safe place where they can “be wild.” This fantasy of living in a world where that excess of thought and feeling is celebrated is the fantasy that drives this trio as they move through their separate realities. Each of the three women literally creates fantasy worlds – Gondal and Slender Man and the play itself – and they also feel crippled by the intrusion of fantasy into their “real” lives, where they’re repeatedly told that they’re not good enough, in addition to being too much. This push and pull between shortcoming and excess is the hallmark of being a woman, and of adolescence and young adulthood in general. By the time I started writing *Gondal*, it was my fourth play that focused on young women.

I write for and about young women as a way of keeping in touch with the heightened emotional immediacy and intensity specific to that experience. I find that teenagers and young adults have the most immediate access to their feelings, which are big and wild, all-consuming and ever-changing. So many things are still so new in that time of life; feelings are still something worn on sleeves instead of kept close to the chest. The best stories center around change – the need to change, the desire to change, the resistance to change – and young people

are at a time in their lives when *everything* is changing. The scope and consequence of these feelings, these changes, make that age group my favorite theatrical subjects.

In *Gondal*, Lainey's Crush on Luke Stapleton is deeply painful because it's a reminder of all the things she's not, the fantasies that can never be. It's also a kind of self-betrayal – Lainey wants so badly to be the kind of girl who isn't driven by her feelings or her crushes on boys. She wants to engage with the deep darkness that lives inside her and talk about bones and eyeballs and blood and have that be enough. Her tension lies in the intersection of these dark desires with her everyday teenage desires. When she describes how Luke makes her feel, it's filled with the same kind of imagery native to horror movies – eaten eyeballs and crushed bodies. Those intensely physical sensations and grotesqueness are what adolescence is all about. It's hard to separate feeling from body when you're longing for boys and bleeding out of your vagina, both for the first time. Lainey *has* to frame her experience within the frame of the grotesque; it's the only way to make any kind of sense out of it all.

This relationship between adolescence and grotesqueness has long been something I've felt the need to explore. I knew it was something I was after in *Gondal*, but I hadn't been able to articulate why and how. During PDW, we were asked to bring in a contextual article for our projects; I brought in an article called "Our World Alone: An epistolary meditation on Lorde, Flannery O'Connor, and the ache of being a teenager." The article was published on *Rookie*, a site targeted toward teenage girls, and it dealt with the relationship between adolescence and grotesqueness, and how teenagers define themselves through the lens of the culture they consume. It struck me that this intense relationship to art is something we learn out of necessity

in adolescence – covering our bedrooms with posters of celebrities and our bodies with t-shirts of our favorite bands. Delving more into this teenage relationship made me look at its deep ties to my own history and relationship with books. It also helped me understand the role of Slender Man in the play; he is the extreme equivalent of Lainey and Emily’s favorite band, of my beloved books, a grotesque figure through which they can define themselves.

This grotesqueness is directly tied to “too muchness,” which manifests as a question repeated throughout *Gondal: where can I be wild?* Writing about wildness is tricky. If the play itself doesn’t feel wild, we don’t buy it; if the play feels *too* wild, it risks feeling out of control in a way that could alienate the audience. In *Gondal*, harnessing the wildness was (and is) slippery. I wanted it to be clear that Kimberly, Emily, and Lainey are still actively wrestling with their relationship to wildness – with Lainey and Emily, specifically, it was important to me to show a moment in which they had to make a certain kind of choice. My intention was to show these characters at a point of reckoning – with the world, with themselves. I was also interested in the tug of war between extremes, and how I’ve often erred on the side of safety when the things/people/art I’m drawn to err on the side of danger. I’ve often skirted around my darkness or wildness, because the way I was raised taught me to be quiet and agreeable and sweet. In order to write many of the plays I want to write, however, I’ve kept in close touch with my internal teenager, and in that close communication with past selves I am discovering and honoring parts of teenage Kimberly I’d previously cast aside.

**It is generally anger dreams that occupy my nights now.
This is not uncommon after loss of love—**

**blue and black and red blasting the crater open.
I am interested in anger.**

I clamber along to find the source.

- Anne Carson, *The Glass Essay*

In *Gondal*, Kimberly's primary topic of fantasy is her relationship with power – over people, over situations, over her work, over herself and her feelings. As the play progresses and she feels more and more out of control, she realizes that the loss of control can double as a tactic to gain power. Instead of trying to find the balance between too much and not enough, what happens when you go past the limits of too much altogether? In one of Kimberly's monologues (the one about heartbreak and natural disasters that I wrote longhand on an airplane), Kimberly talks about the effects of floods – how nothing can grow from flooded earth for years after. *The ground is too heavy. Too wet. Too much.* Since the monologue is equating physical and emotional destruction, I thought about this phenomenon of post-flood growth in relation to feelings. I've always *felt* a lot. Everything hits me too hard and stays around for too long. There have been periods when a flood of feelings hit me so hard that I turned into a numb shell of myself for extended periods of time, unable to fully process or move on.

It's only been in the past few years that this recurring numbness and its accumulation has turned to anger. I became intensely angry at all the time I'd wasted – at the people who had embodied the flood, but mostly at myself. I often struggle to know what to *do* with my anger; if it stays inside me, it festers and becomes painful, if it goes outside me, it infects other people and becomes destructive. What do I *do* with it? (*Where can I be wild? Where is it safe?*) My anger came to a head during my second year at UT, when school and work pressures collided with my outside life. My parents decided to sell my childhood home, a place that feels intimately tied to who I am. This knowledge made me feel all kinds of things I wasn't prepared for – namely, an

intense, irrational anger. When I found myself in moments of anger-free lucidity, my parents' decision made sense. They didn't need such a big space for two people; the upkeep of a farm was increasingly physically demanding; they wanted to be closer to my brother, who had a growing family and farm of his own, both of which my parents were eager to share. But the rational reasons why didn't make my anger go away. In fact, it made it worse. I was angry at myself for not having a family of my own that my parents could share. I was angry that I hadn't ever found someone important enough to take home and share in my family, my home. I was angry that I still felt so attached to a place I had hastened to leave as soon as I could.

In the early drafts of *Gondal*, I had written about saying goodbye to the house and all that it contained – namely, a chimney in the nearby woods that became my favorite place in the world – but I didn't connect that sorrow to anger until later in the play's life. I started to see the depth of the relationship between Kimberly's anger and my own real-life anger, and I decided to put that relationship at the center of the play. In this past semester, I completely rewrote Kimberly's arc in the play. The childhood home being sold became the catalyzing event, and Kimberly's anger became less of a feeling and more of a call to action. This new opening became a catalyst that connects the rest of the monologues into a cohesive trajectory. Kimberly's anger previously came primarily from her history with love and her struggle to forge a connection with other people, which seemed relevant but failed to impact the other dramatic events. Thus, I activated this rumination on love and loss in relation to the selling of the house: Kimberly is coming back one last time, and so she must reckon with everything that's accumulated to contribute to this moment, this anger. This reckoning is what drives Kimberly to both conjure and interact with the other two worlds in the play; it's what propels the entire play into action. She creates characters

who are reckoning with similar struggles and feelings within different contexts. I worked to grow the arc of each piece of the play's triptych – the Brontë family, contemporary teenagers, and Kimberly – and then I wanted the form of the play as a whole to mirror its content. Since the anger and obsession in this play is a largely destructive force, I worked to make the play's progression more and more chaotic, as if it destroys itself from the inside out. When Kimberly reaches the site of her beloved chimney for the last time, she chooses to name herself as the playwright and takes on a different tactic in dealing with her anger– she takes on the dark power of Slender Man.

Essentially, I'm interested in the belief systems, influences, and imaginations of young girls - how that shapes who they become, what they hold onto, and how they channel it into the world. When does it lead them to retreat inside of themselves and forsake the outside world (as the Emilys Brontë and Dickinson did)? When does it breed madness, and how? When does it breed creativity? Where is the line between madness and creativity?

I'm interested in exploring these themes and ideas in the context of the Brontë sisters, if possible. I'm having a hard time finding my way "in" to this play in general, especially with them as characters. Are they characters? How realistic are their characterizations – is it important for the audience to know that these are the Brontë sisters, or is it just contextual? Is this a period play?

I'm still in the investigative/idea stage. I don't yet know the story, style, or even the characters.

- Kimberly Belflower, Playwriting Workshop Journal, September 2015.

In March 2017, I got stuck while writing this thesis. *Gondal* was in tech; I was intellectually and emotionally exhausted, but I had pages due. I started going through all my old documents with any relevance to *Gondal* to see if there was anything I could use. Two hours later, I was in tears and had twenty pages of material I'd pulled from old journal entries and class reflections. So many of the discoveries I made during *Gondal's* development were already there, in its early development. Much of what I've learned in grad school is how to dance the dance

between my gut impulses and the tools I've gathered to sharpen my craft – too often I either separate the two, or I get so deep into one that I lose sight of the other. Finding these journals was such a gift, both to this thesis, and to my writing process going forward. Just as I'm always in conversation with other work and other words, I can also be in conversation with my own work, my own life, my own words. My relationship with my work is my relationship with myself.

**9. It's an accumulation.
(conclusion)**

*"Another week, another panic spiral over whether or not I'm a real playwright.
I think I've decided that I am.*

I've spoken about this already, but it bears repeating: I realized lately that this process with Gondal reminds me a lot of my process with Lost Girl. Both plays were inspired by existing stories that intersected with my real life. Both plays began with a series of monologues. The subject matter is wildly different (though there is a strong sense of longing and self-reflection in both stories), but my approach to writing them has been the same in many ways: lots of free-writing, personal material, sections with no character delineation, and poetry.

However, when I started writing Lost Girl, I didn't know how to write a play; all of the free-writing was me getting everything out of my brain without quite knowing what to do with it for a while. Now I know how to write a play, but I don't know how to write every play. I think I had fixated on the idea that in order to advance as a playwright, my process had to completely change – that is completely untrue. My process isn't a one-size-fits all. It's not something I'll learn only in grad school. It's an accumulation of everything I've ever written and every way I've ever written. It's all there, whenever I need it."

- Kimberly Belflower, Playwriting Workshop Journal, November 2015

LOST GIRL

a play by Kimberly Belflower

CHARACTERS

5W / 5M

The following roles should be doubled:

Cora/A, Mother/B, Callie/C, Nina/D

Slightly/Detective, Toodles/Boy,

Curly/Therapist, Nibs/Doctor

Wendy	18-22. Full of melancholy, longing, and hope, with an undercurrent of tough determination.
Peter	18-22. Charismatic in a soft, sneaky way. He's not the bad guy. He has a side of the story just as complicated as Wendy's.
A, B, C, D	18-22. Female chorus. Different versions of Wendy – memories distorted through time, other girls who went to Neverland.
Mother	40s. Tired, but patient.
Cora	18-22. No-nonsense.
Callie	18-22. Romantic, but self-aware.
Nina	18. Sweet. Comes across as fragile and even a bit ditzy, but she knows what she wants and how to get it.
Slightly	18-22. Brooding, kind, and fiercely loyal.
Toodles	18-22. Silly and sincere.
Nibs	18-22. Logical. Acerbic.
Curly	18-22. Laidback and observant.
Detective	30s/40s. Single-minded but always on the edge of defeat.
Therapist	30s/40s. Trying his best.
Doctor	30s/40s. Even-tempered.
Boy	18-25. Quiet confidence.

SETTING

The set should allow for fast, fluid changes between time and place.

Places include :

Wendy's room – The Nursery. There is a large window.

Offices of the Detective, Doctor, and Therapist.

The Boy's bedroom.

Yards with laundry lines.

Neutral places like coffee shops, park benches.

PUNCTUATION AND PACING

“/” indicates an overlap in speech. Whenever a “/” appears, the next line of dialogue should immediately begin.

The play should move quickly. Transitions between scenes happen *within* the world of the play.

Use line breaks and punctuation as clues for breath, importance, and pace.

“ ‘Which did you like best of all?’

‘I think I liked the home under the ground best of all.’

‘Yes, so do I. What was the last thing Peter ever said to you?’

‘The last thing he ever said to me was,
Just always be waiting for me...’ ”

- JM Barrie, Peter Pan

for Gail Jones.

*A spare stage.
A large window.*

A

Did you hear –?

D

Did you know –?

C

About the girl –

B

Wendy –

DETECTIVE

That girl and her two brothers –

A

Michael –

C

John –

THERAPIST

All three children –

D

Gone.

DOCTOR

Taken.

DETECTIVE

We don't know if they were taken.

B

They're only children, they couldn't have gotten far on their own.

BOY

The window was open.

C

But the doors were still locked.

D

Can you imagine?

A

I just can't even imagine.

D

Their poor mother.

*The Detective and Wendy's Mother.
Eight days after the children
disappeared.
The Detective reviews paperwork.*

DETECTIVE

They've been gone for –
How long?
One week?

MOTHER

Eight days.

The Detective makes a note.

DETECTIVE

We're optimistic that some of our leads will pay off soon.
Now please, just one more time.
Was there anything different about that night?
The last time you saw them?

MOTHER

It was supposed to be Wendy's last night in the nursery.
They were in their beds.
Side by side by side.
"The Nursery" is a leftover name from a long time ago.
They've all slept in the same room since they were babies.
But it was time.
Wendy was at That Age.

DETECTIVE

What age is that?

MOTHER

When everything changes.
When everything matters.
Anything that happens –
It's bigger than it would have been before, than it will be after.
It gets into your bones and it doesn't leave.
It starts around the time you stop wearing bows in your hair.

*Wendy Darling and Peter Pan in
Neverland.*

*We hear their voices.
We see their shadows.
We might see Wendy, but we should
not see Peter's face.*

WENDY

Why is it called Neverland?
Why not Foreverland?

PETER

We can change the name if you want to.

WENDY

I suppose they're different versions of the same thing.
Never.
Forever.
They're both promises.

PETER

Oh, Wendy Darling.

WENDY

Yes, Peter Pan?

PETER

Nothing.
I like saying your name.
It feels as pretty to say as you are to look at.

WENDY

...I want to give you something.

What?	PETER
What would you like?	WENDY
Whatever you want to give me.	PETER
But I want to give you something you like.	WENDY
I'll like it.	PETER
How do you know?	WENDY
I know.	PETER
How about a kiss?	WENDY
What's that?	PETER
Surely you know what a kiss is.	WENDY
I'll know when you give me one.	PETER
...I've never given one before.	WENDY
I'll take good care of it.	PETER
It's not that kind of gift, silly.	WENDY
Oh.	PETER

You're going to want it back, aren't you?
People always give things, and then they always want them back.

WENDY

No.
I won't want this back.
I want you to keep it.
Here –

Wendy walks toward Peter.

*The moment disappears.
Peter's shadow goes away.*

*Wendy is alone in her room – the Nursery
she once shared with her brothers.*

WENDY

I give myself eight minutes a day to think about him.
Uninterrupted. Without feeling guilty or mad at myself.
It seems a reasonable amount of time –
Eight is my favorite number.
I've whittled it down over the years.
Maybe one day it'll be five minutes.
Then two.
Then no minutes at all.

He said come away with me.
He said forever.
I said
That's an awfully long time
and I guess we were just saying pretty words
Even though it felt big and real.
We were kids, you know.
Kids say things.
He was a boy.
I was a girl.
Boys make big promises.
Girls know better than to believe them,
but they go along with them anyway.

I went along with him anyway.

WENDY

The first time I saw him, I saw his shadow first.
I was pretending to be asleep
but I wasn't asleep.
It was around the time I stopped thinking that staying up late was a victory.

The first time I kissed him, it felt more like flying than flying did.
The last time I kissed him was the last time I saw him.
The last time I saw him, he said he'd be back.
He said I should wait.
And I did.
I do.
Because he said I should.

I didn't know the last time would be the last time.
If I had known, I...

When he flew away from my window for the last time, it started to snow.
It was never winter there –
It was part of the magic, somehow.
He said,
"It's only winter when he goes away."
And he was right.

Snow.
An echo of the past.
The cardboard boxes go away.

A

Did you hear –?

B

Do you know –?

C

That girl.

D

What was her name?

THERAPIST

Those children.

C

Her brothers.

B

The ones who were gone.

DETECTIVE

They're back.

D

Where did they go?

DOCTOR

What was the word?

BOY

It sounded made-up.

B

Neverland.

DETECTIVE

No official statement has been given.

C

But the girl –

A

Something's wrong with her, they say.

B

They say she won't speak.

DOCTOR

They say she can't speak.

D

They say she doesn't understand when people speak to her.

A

Her eyes are wild, they say.

C

She can't stop crying, they say.

D
She never sleeps, they say.

B
She sleeps all day, she wakes at night.

A
Her hair was filthy, twigs and leaves and mud.

C
What a nightmare.

D
She brought all these boys with her –

*The Lost Boys gather around
Wendy.*

C
Strange boys –

B
With strange names –

D
They sounded made-up.

A
Just like that place.

C
Toodles?

B
Nibs?

C
Curly?

D
Slightly?

A

What kinds of names are those?

B

None of them wore any shoes –

D

Their hair grown into clumps –

C

They had all been taken, too, she claimed.

B

Children, taken away from their warm beds.

D

Away from their mothers and fathers who loved them.

A

Away through the window, just like that.

B

Where did they come from?

C

Why were they there?

A

Why did she bring them back?

D

What are they going to do now?

WENDY

They asked me a lot of questions, when I got back.

Years ago.

The Detective's office.

Wendy has just returned from

Neverland two days earlier.

DETECTIVE

Were they in danger? These boys?

Is that why you brought them back?

WENDY
No.

DETECTIVE
Was it him?
Peter?

Wendy says nothing.

DETECTIVE
Where does he live?

WENDY
You won't find him.

DETECTIVE
What if you showed us the way?

WENDY
Can you fly?

DETECTIVE
Can you?

WENDY
I could.
I don't think I can anymore.

DETECTIVE
That sounds dangerous.

WENDY
It is.
Was.

DETECTIVE
What can you tell me about him?

Wendy looks away. Says nothing.

A
He loves stories.

B

One night I heard him crying when he thought I was asleep.
I never told him.
I never asked why.

DETECTIVE

Wendy? Did you hear me?
What can you tell me about him?

WENDY

Nothing.

DETECTIVE

Did he hurt you?

WENDY

What do you mean?

DETECTIVE

Answer the question.

WENDY

There are a lot of ways to be hurt.
I think you're asking about a specific way.
Aren't you?

DETECTIVE

Three young children disappear...
We can't help but make assumptions.

WENDY

Making assumptions is symptomatic of a faulty imagination.

DETECTIVE

Mighty big words.
Your mother said how smart you are.

WENDY

No.
He didn't hurt me like that.
I fell down and scraped my knee and my elbow, though.
When we were running one night.
See?

DETECTIVE

What were you running from?

WENDY

We were running *to*, not from.

DETECTIVE

What were you running to?

C

A fairy dance.

D

A pirate ship.

A

A mermaid lagoon.

B

There wasn't a mermaid lagoon.

C

Was there?

A

Of course there was.

D

How could you forget?

WENDY

Who can remember.

There was always so much.

We were always running.

DETECTIVE

Tell me more.

WENDY

It was magical.

And scary.

DETECTIVE

Scary how?

WENDY

Why don't you ask about how it was magical?
Everybody wants to know about scary, no one wants to know about magical.

DETECTIVE

Okay, then, how was it magical?

WENDY

Literally.
There was magic everywhere.
In the air, in the water, in the trees...
We had to keep a careful eye on the trees –
Their shadows sneak up on you if you aren't careful.
Shadows are different there –
There's an entire colony of them.
Peter's gets away from him all the time and he –

The Detective makes a note.

WENDY

I know you don't believe me.

DETECTIVE

I didn't say that.

Beat.

And how was it scary?

WENDY

Because of the magic.
Because it was everywhere.
Because of him.

C

I had never felt those kinds of feelings.
They were so big, it felt dangerous.

D

I think that ultimately, there are two groups of people in this world –
Those who shine with a holy light, and those who notice.
He shone.
I noticed.

DETECTIVE

Your Mother says that you've been different since you came back
And that John and Michael are the same.
Do you think that's true?

WENDY

You ask a lot of questions.

DETECTIVE

That's my job.

WENDY

Pretty easy job.
Can I try?

DETECTIVE

Ask away.

WENDY

How long was I gone?

DETECTIVE

How long do you think you were gone?

WENDY

A year.

Beat.

Longer?

DETECTIVE

Nine days.

Beat.

WENDY

Oh.

A long pause.
Wendy digests this information.

DETECTIVE

Your mother said you haven't stopped crying.

Why?

WENDY

People cry.
Life is hard.
Don't bother looking.
You won't find him.
He does the finding.

*A Doctor's office.
The Doctor checks Wendy's glands.*

DOCTOR

Open.

*Wendy opens her mouth.
The Doctor peers in.*

DOCTOR

Say "ahhhhh."

WENDY

Ahhhhhhhhhhhh.

B

The first time I saw him
I screamed.
He was at my window, and I don't live on the ground floor.
To be perfectly honest, it was all a bit frightening.

*The Doctor puts a tongue depressor
inside Wendy's mouth.
Looks.
Takes it out.*

DOCTOR

Good.
Now close.

Wendy closes her mouth.

DOCTOR

Good.

*The Doctor checks Wendy's eyes with
an ophthalmoscope.*

A

I don't believe anything a boy tells me.
Or
I believe everything a boy tells me.
It's never in between.

*The Doctor presses on her chest, her
head. He prepares a stethoscope.*

DOCTOR

Deep breath
In.

Wendy takes a deep breath in.

D

It was around the time candy started hurting my stomach.

DOCTOR

Out.

Wendy lets a deep breath out.

C

I was worried – I'm a worrier – I worry too much, I'm told.
But somehow, I knew he needed someone to worry about him.
Maybe he knew that I needed someone to worry about.
I don't know. I like to think so.

DOCTOR

Good.

Wendy and her Therapist.

THERAPIST

So you feel he took something tangible from you?
Something you could touch, something you could lose?

WENDY

I guess.

THERAPIST

How does that make you feel?

WENDY

Empty.

THERAPIST

How do you think that makes him feel?

WENDY

Full.

Beat.

THERAPIST

I know this has all been quite overwhelming, Wendy.
Doctors and detectives. Newspapers and questions.
I don't want you to think of me as your therapist.
I want you to think of me as your friend.
Someone you can talk to.

*Wendy says nothing.
The Therapist waits patiently, then
can't take it anymore.*

Do you want to tell me anything else about him?

WENDY

No thank you.

THERAPIST

What about your parents?

WENDY

I don't have any.

THERAPIST

Yes, you do. Your mother is waiting in the lobby.

WENDY

What if I told you she wasn't my mother?

THERAPIST

Wendy.

WENDY

You're no fun.

*He makes a note.
Beat.*

WENDY

Did she tell you my dad left?

THERAPIST

She did.

WENDY

Yeah.

Beat.

THERAPIST

That must be very hard.
Especially on top of everything else.

WENDY

I haven't paid it much attention.
I have a hard time focusing on more than one feeling at the same time.

THERAPIST

I'm sure you've paid it some attention.
What have you noticed? What's different?

WENDY

Well.
John and Michael went with him.
They didn't like everybody talking about them.
Clean break. Fresh start.
They were louder than me,
so it's quieter now.
And he was big, my father.
So the house has kind of – opened up.

THERAPIST

Big how?

WENDY

In every way.

Tall.

Fat.

Big laugh.

Big talker.

Big thinker.

But he could fill you up with his bigness, or he could use it to make you feel small.

So now there's this big emptiness he left behind
and everything else is a different size.

I guess my mom and I always hid behind him, on different sides?

And we never really saw each other until he was gone.

So it's good that all this other stuff is going on.

It's good that she has to bring me here, to talk to you.

Now we have other things to hide behind.

A

Did you hear –?

DOCTOR

Do you remember –?

B

That girl.

DETECTIVE

Wendy.

D

How old is she now?

A

Old enough.

B

She grew up.

BOY

They say she hardly leaves the house.

C

Still.

They say she cries all the time.

THERAPIST

Still.

D

They say she doesn't sleep.

DOCTOR

Still.

A

They say she doesn't have any friends.

B

Besides those boys.

C

"The Lost Boys."

D

I forgot about the boys.

A

She never got over it, they say.

DETECTIVE

She doesn't even try, they say.

BOY

How long has it been?

THERAPIST

Long enough.

A

She's had time.

B

She's had a lot of time.

C

D

She needs to get out more.

DOCTOR

She needs to try harder.

A

She needs to not think about him so much.

B

Didn't *she* leave *him*?

C

Technically.

D

It's complicated.

DETECTIVE

He was supposed to come back.

A

That's what he said.

B

And he never came back?

THERAPIST

He never came back.

C

He promised.

BOY

And then –

C

Oh, it's terrible –

DOCTOR

Her father left.

A

Where did he go?

Another town. D

Away from her. C

Away from her Mother. B

He left as soon she came back with those boys – D

Her brothers left too. B

They went with their Father. C

But she stayed. DETECTIVE

She's still in that room. BOY

The room where she met him. D

I feel sorry for her. A

Don't. C

WENDY
The first time I saw him
I was wearing a blue nightgown my mother bought me.
The fabric was still stiff and a little bit scratchy, but it was so pretty I didn't care.

I give myself eight minutes a day to think about him.

Then I tuck my thoughts away, when I finish thinking them.
I catalog my thoughts –
The things I want to forget.

The things I want to remember.
The things I want to have around but not have inside of me.
I don't have a formal system.
I put them in all kinds of things.
Not in files, or boxes
Nowhere people would suspect.

I put them between the pages of books.
In the backs of cabinets.
Behind paintings on the wall.
Under loose floorboards.
I sew them into the lining of coats.

THERAPIST

It seems to me, Wendy, that you have endowed your childhood bedroom –
“The Nursery” –
With an awful lot of importance.
It's okay to go slow.
Honor your own healing process.
But you have to set goals.
You have to do something.
Go for a walk around the block.
Say hi to someone you've never seen before.
On average, you have to meet forty people before you make one lasting
connection.
Why don't you try to make one lasting connection?

WENDY

I have lasting connections.

THERAPIST

A new lasting connection.

WENDY

Forty people seems like a lot.

THERAPIST

You'd be surprised at how quickly they can add up.
Especially if you leave the house.
Come on, Wendy.
Show me how good you can be at following steps.
Forty people.
Just try.

Wendy meets forty people.

A

One.

WENDY

Hello, I'm Wendy Darling.

B

Two.

WENDY

Hi, my name is Wendy.

C

Ten.

WENDY

Nice to meet you.

D

Twenty.

WENDY

It's not easy.

You could do it in one day if you really wanted to, but that's not leaving any room for a potential connection.

You can't rush these things.

A

Twenty-seven.

WENDY

It's rare to meet someone with the same level of investment.

Most people don't really like to stop and adjust their plans.

B

Thirty-four.

WENDY

But you never know.

That's what they say.

C

Forty-two.

WENDY

Forty-two?
It didn't work?

D

Sometimes it doesn't.

B

You can't plan things like connection.

C

Why not?

WENDY

But I tried so hard.

A

Sometimes it happens when you least expect it.

B

That's what they say.

D

I hate when they say that.

C

But sometimes –

A Boy appears.

BOY

Hey.

WENDY

Hey.

A

Sometimes it's true.

The Boy smiles at Wendy.

She smiles back.

D

How do you know when it's a lasting connection?

A

It depends.

Wendy and The Boy move closer.

D

On what?

B

How long he stays.

Wendy and The Boy hold hands.

C

How much he knows.

A

How much *you* know.

D

How long is long enough?
How much is too much?

C

It depends.

D

On what?

*A room with a bed.
Wendy is lying down with the Boy.*

WENDY

This is nice.

*The Boy smiles at Wendy.
He gets out of bed, then leans down to
kiss her.*

She goes in for more, but he pulls away.

WENDY

Wait.
Come back.

BOY

Later.

WENDY

Where are you going?

BOY

Away.

WENDY

Why are you going?

BOY

Because.

WENDY

That's not a reason.
Hey.
What's wrong?

BOY

Nothing.

WENDY

You're lying. I can tell.

BOY

Wendy.
You don't have to pretend.

WENDY

What do you mean?

BOY

It's – when we kiss.
I can't feel you.

It's like you're not there.
Or like you're kissing someone else, far away, not me.
Kissing you is like kissing a memory.

WENDY

That's silly.

BOY

No.
It's not silly.
It's the way I feel.
And I don't want to feel that way anymore.
Can you even remember what I look like, when I'm not here?

WENDY

You're beautiful.

BOY

What color are my eyes?

Silence.

Let me know. If you figure it out.

WENDY

Figure what out?

He is gone.

WENDY

Are they blue?
Or is that someone else?

C

The first time I saw him, I saw his shadow first.

D

His lips were chapped and his eyes were blue.

A

I gave him a kiss before I knew
What it felt like. What it meant.
And now I know
But now it feels different. Now it means different things.

C

The first time I saw him, the room was dark – except for a single pool of light from the moon outside the open window.

B

It looked like he was the only person in the world.

D

It felt like he was the only person in the world.

A

He shone. I noticed.

D

I met him when we were both very young and enchanted with the possibilities of our lives.

C

It was around the time I stopped pretending to be scared of boys and became actually scared of them.

B

We shaped one another and consumed one another the way that only very young people can.

A

I told him stories.

B

He loved stories.

WENDY

I wanted him to see –
There is a world inside me, too.
There is a world that has nothing to do with you.
But he always liked the stories about him best.

Wendy and her Mother.

MOTHER

Are you all right?

WENDY
Yes, Mother.

MOTHER
I thought I heard crying in the hall.

WENDY
It must have been the maid.

MOTHER
We don't have a maid.

WENDY
We used to.

MOTHER
Your voice sounds discouraged.
Are you discouraged?

WENDY
I'm tired.

MOTHER
You slept all day.

WENDY
No, I didn't.
I just stayed in my room.

MOTHER
I thought you were sleeping.

WENDY
I was being sad.

MOTHER
It's fine to be sad...

WENDY
Thank you.
That's not what I thought you'd say.

MOTHER
But Wendy, dear, you're always sad.

It's not fine to be always sad.

WENDY

I'm not always sad.

MOTHER

I was understanding at first, but it's gotten out of hand.
It's become a problem, and it's time to do something about it.

WENDY

I am doing all kinds of things about it.
I just haven't found anything that works.

MOTHER

I've decided to turn the nursery into an office.

I've wanted one for years.
If you want to stay here, you can move to one of the downstairs rooms.
Some change will do you good.

Beat.

WENDY

No.

MOTHER

It's not a question.

WENDY

That's my *room*.

MOTHER

It has become more than a room.
It's a fixation.
You still sleep with the window open, after all these years.
You –
Your doctors and I all agree.
It's time.

WENDY

Why have you been talking to my doctors?!
This is crazy! I *like* the window open, it has nothing to do with –

MOTHER

I am doing the best I know how to help you be happy.

WENDY

Why does everyone have to be happy?
When did that become the goal?
Maybe I don't like being happy.
I don't trust it.
Because as soon as you feel happiness, it's already gone
And who knows if you can ever get it back.
There's this pressure
When I'm happy
To remember every detail –
Everything that led up to that exact happiness
So I can follow the steps and make it happen all over again.
And then I do that –
I follow the steps.
And it's never quite the same.
Even when it's good
It's not *as* good
Or if it's *as* good
It's a different *kind* of good.
I always end up disappointed.
And after a while
I guess I got used to that disappointment.
It's nice to be used to something.

So I'm sorry if you think being sad is a problem.
But for me, happiness is the problem.
It aches and it breaks and it leaves.
Sadness, though.
Sadness stays.
It's sturdy, and it's strong.
It burrows into your shoulder –
It stays all night.

*The Nursery.
Wendy and the Lost Boys – Slightly,
Toodles, Nibs, and Curly – sit in a
comfortable, cuddly pile.
There are cardboard boxes that
haven't been put together yet.*

WENDY

My mom doesn't understand.

Neither does mine.

NIBS

You don't have a mom.

WENDY

Exactly.

NIBS

She's turning my room into an office
And she's pretending like
It's "for my own good."

WENDY

Maybe it is.

TOODLES

Wendy gives Toodles A Look.

Maybe it isn't.

Are you still seeing that guy?

CURLY

No.
He left.
Everybody leaves.
Do you think it's me?

WENDY

Never.

NIBS

You're perfect.

TOODLES

Oh, stop it.

WENDY
(pleased)

You're a delicate little flower. Some boys just can't appreciate that.

CURLY

WENDY
I don't think I'm delicate.
Am I delicate?

CURLY
Like, mentally delicate.

TOODLES
Emotionally.

WENDY
I did it, though.
I followed the steps.
I tried.
That must count for something.

NIBS
Definitely!

CURLY
You're doing so well.

SLIGHTLY
Aren't you supposed to be out doing something today?
Meeting more people?

WENDY
I couldn't bear the idea of everyone being together without me.
It's so rare these days that everyone's in the same place.
I hate it.

CURLY
Me too.

TOODLES
Me three.

NIBS
Me four.

TOODLES
Is it part of growing up, do you think? Seeing your friends less?

WENDY

My mom doesn't have any friends.
I always swore I would never be like her, ever.

Maybe I'll run away.
Stay with one of you and not tell her
Not until she's really sorry.
Nibs, you have an extra room!

Nibs and Curly exchange a look.

NIBS

I don't think that's a good idea.

WENDY

Oh.

NIBS

I'm sorry, Wendy.
I love you.
I do.
I just
Sometimes
I need a break.

Silence.

SLIGHTLY

You can stay with me, if you want.
I don't need a break.

WENDY

No.
I'm –
It was just a silly idea.

Beat.

Everybody always leaves me
But I can never seem to do the leaving.

CURLY
(*re: Peter*)

...you did, though.

WENDY

What?

TOODLES
(covering for Curly)

Nothing.

SLIGHTLY
Did that guy say anything before he left?

Wendy didn't want to be asked that question.

WENDY

He says
He can't
Feel me.
He says
It's like I'm kissing somebody else.

NIBS

Oh.
Well that makes sense.

An echo of a memory. The voices of Wendy and Peter from years ago.

WENDY
(voice)

What would you like?

PETER
(voice)

Whatever you want to give me.

WENDY
How does that make sense?

CURLY
You've always been kissing someone else.

PETER
(voice)

You're going to want it back, aren't you?

WENDY
(*voice*)

No.
I want you to keep it.

NIBS

You and Slightly kissed.
Slightly, did you feel it?

WENDY

That was a New Year's Eve kiss.
It doesn't count.

SLIGHTLY

I counted it.

WENDY

Well, I didn't.

SLIGHTLY

Maybe that's your problem. You don't count things.

WENDY

I don't have a problem.

NIBS

You have a lot of problems.

WENDY

You do!

TOODLES

We all do.

CURLY

I, for one, am very well-adjusted.

WENDY
(*a realization*)

Peter still has my kiss.

I gave it to him.
What if no one else can really have it, while he does?
What if that's why I've had such a hard time?

NIBS

Wendy. No.

WENDY

What other option do I have?
Spend the rest of my life without being felt?
I want to be felt.
I want to feel.
I have to find him.

C

I thought I saw him yesterday morning.
We were both in line at my favorite shop for tea.
His hand brushed against mine as we both reached for the sugar, and I –
His lips were chapped, and his eyes were blue.

B

His eyes were brown.

A

His eyes were green.

*Wendy with the Doctor.
He listens to her heart.*

D

His hands were the first hands I ever held in that special way.
The way that's not like holding hands with your dad.
The way that gives you butterflies.
All those feelings inside,
Just from hands.
Who knew?

DOCTOR

All vital signs are normal.
Heartbeat a bit fast.
Nothing to be concerned about.
Everything's normal.

WENDY

My shadow's too heavy.
Can you fix it?

DOCTOR

Shadows don't weigh anything.

WENDY

Mine does.
And it's getting bigger.
I'm telling you – there's something wrong with me.
Can you check again?

Beat.

DOCTOR

Say "ah."

WENDY

Ahhhhhh.

*The Doctor checks her tongue with a
tongue depressor and continues an
examination.*

D

Shadows stick around.

B

They follow you.

A

All the things you hold onto.

C

All the lives you don't lead
But almost led.

B

Some people don't have shadows.

D

Why not?

They don't hold onto things.

A

They shed themselves like snakes.

C

I don't feel normal.

WENDY

Feelings are not part of my job.

DOCTOR

*Wendy with her Therapist.
They're playing cards.*

Do you have any Twos?

THERAPIST

No.

WENDY

Beat.

Wendy.
What are we supposed to say?

THERAPIST

Silence.

Instead of "No"
In this game.

...
We're supposed to say "Go Fish."
Do you remember?

Beat.

It's good practice
To follow rules.

Do you have any Princesses?

WENDY

THERAPIST

There is no such thing as Princesses in cards.

WENDY

Do you have any Cats?

THERAPIST

I know sometimes rules feel silly –

WENDY

What feels Silly is playing Go Fish past the age of twelve.

THERAPIST

Structure is a useful tool.

WENDY

It doesn't work!

Your Structure.

Your Tools.

I met forty people and I tried and you're wrong and I'm going to find Peter.

I have to.

It's the only thing that will work.

THERAPIST

I understand why you think that might help.

But it's important you don't regress.

Implementing structure takes time.

WENDY

I don't

Have

Time.

THERAPIST

It might feel worse before it feels better, but it will feel better.

Structure helps. Time helps.

They give us containers for our feelings.

WENDY

You're lucky.

To have feelings that fit inside containers.

That sounds nice.

A

I had never felt those kinds of feelings.

D

We shaped one another.

C

We consumed one another.

B

I had never felt those kinds of feelings.

C

They were so big, it felt dangerous.

Wendy and the Lost Boys.

WENDY

I could put up fliers. All over town.

TOODLES

What would they say?

WENDY

“Urgent
Wendy Darling seeks Peter Pan.”

NIBS

Hmmmm.
No.
People will think that’s a metaphor.

TOODLES

“Have you seen this boy?”

NIBS

Maybe.

WENDY

“I need you.”

TOODLES

I’d stop and look at that.

CURLY

It's nice to be needed.

NIBS

Sometimes it makes me tired.

SLIGHTLY

I don't know how effective fliers will be.

CURLY

You never know who could see them.

TOODLES

I have a question.

WENDY

What?

TOODLES

I don't understand how Peter kept your kiss.

SLIGHTLY

That's not a question.

TOODLES

Sorry.

WENDY

Don't apologize when you have nothing to apologize for.

TOODLES

How did Peter keep your kiss?

There.

Now it's a question.

CURLY

Like, a kiss is a physical thing, right?

But it's also an idea?

It's like the wind.

You can see the wind, you can feel it, you can hear it, but you can't keep it.

TOODLES

Yeah!

You can't *not* feel the wind, when it blows.

WENDY

Kisses are different than weather.

NIBS

Look.

*Nibs kisses Curly.
Then he kisses Toodles.*

NIBS

Did both of you feel me?

CURLY

Yep.

TOODLES

Uh-huh.

NIBS

See?

WENDY

You still don't understand.
You kissed them, but you didn't Give them Your Kiss.
Everybody has one.
One kiss that's theirs alone.
It's usually at the corner of the mouth, but I've seen them other places, too.

The Boys look at her blankly.

Have you never seen one?
You guys.
God.
You never notice anything.

NIBS

Didn't he give you a kiss, too?

WENDY

He *kissed* me, he didn't *give* me *the* kiss.

TOODLES

I am very confused.

WENDY

I can't let confusion get in the way of my quest.

SLIGHTLY

Oh, now it's a quest.

WENDY

Life is a quest.

TOODLES

That's a pretty thought.
And a scary one.

SLIGHTLY

It seems like maybe you should do some more experiments
before you settle on this.
Like, kiss one of us, and we'll see if we can feel it.

WENDY

No.
Then it's a different kind of kiss altogether.
I'm not interested in scientific kissing.

NIBS

Good try, though.

SLIGHTLY

Shut up.

TOODLES

I don't think fliers would hurt.

WENDY

That's the spirit!

CURLY

...it was a really long time ago.
He might not have it anymore.

SLIGHTLY

A kiss isn't something you keep.

WENDY

You don't have to agree, or approve.
You don't even understand.

CURLY

We knew him, too.

WENDY

I know.

NIBS

Sometimes it seems like you forget.

TOODLES

I miss him.

CURLY

He was our family.
It was our home.

SLIGHTLY

We left him behind. Everyone he knew.

TOODLES

I bet he was so sad.

NIBS

Maybe he cried.

TOODLES

I liked it when he cried.

NIBS

Me too.

TOODLES

It was pretty.

SLIGHTLY

We want to help, Wendy, we always want to help you.
But I
Don't know if finding Peter is the best way to do that.

WENDY

It's the *only* way to help me.
If you really want to help, you will.

TOODLES

I'm kind of scared.

WENDY

Oh, don't be scared!
It'll be fun!
An adventure.

NIBS

We don't really like those anymore.

WENDY

Of course we do!

CURLY

I like sleeping in.

WENDY

We can retrace our steps.
Look for fairies.

TOODLES

We could talk to the other girls!

Beat.

He was not supposed to say this.

WENDY

What other girls?

A terrible silence.

*Wendy replays years of her life
through a different lens.*

TOODLES

Oh.
I thought you knew.
I thought she knew.

Do you remember –?	A
Those girls.	B
The others.	D
There were so many others.	C
They say Wendy had no idea.	D
She had to have some idea.	DOCTOR
It went on for years.	DETECTIVE
Everyone knew.	A
Why was she the famous one? Instead of them?	BOY
Because of those Boys. Remember?	C
Three children disappear, seven come back.	DETECTIVE
Because of her family.	THERAPIST
Because she never got past it.	BOY
That's old news –	C
Did you hear about the fliers?	A

Wendy Darling. D

That Wendy Darling. C

She hung up fliers. BOY

They say she's looking for him. DOCTOR

For Peter. B

WENDY
I thought I saw him once, walking in the rain.
His head was down, so I couldn't be sure, but his walk was the same –
Closer to a glide.

There are two groups of people in this world –
Those who shine with a holy light, and those who notice.
He shone.
I –

I give myself eight minutes a day to think about him
But thinking isn't doing
And doing takes more time.

What will They say? DETECTIVE

The others. DOCTOR

When she finds them. B

If she finds them. BOY

What will he say? A

THERAPIST

When she finds him.

C

If she finds him.

The Detective works at his desk.

WENDY

Hello.

Beat.

Do you remember me?

DETECTIVE

How could I forget the famous Wendy Darling?

WENDY

I'm not famous anymore.

DETECTIVE

Oh, I'd say you are.
In some circles, at least.

WENDY

Which circles?

DETECTIVE

Detective circles.
Academic circles.
Those kinds of circles.

WENDY

Those are very different circles.

DETECTIVE

I'd say they're very similar circles.
The nature of the two fields.
They're circular.
Circular circles.
The past affects them both a great deal.
History.

WENDY

I need your help.
I need to find him.

DETECTIVE

Great.

Pause.

WENDY

What's the first step?

DETECTIVE

You think I can just snap my fingers and find him?
Years and years
I kept track.
Took note of the signs
Followed the signs.
Identified the patterns
Memorized the patterns.
Took note of the changes
Adapted to the changes.
Took note of the distance
Traveled the distance.
Waited.
Start again.
Repeat.

It didn't work.
Case is closed.

WENDY

Re-open it.
I found out about the other girls.

D

He knew how to say things I would hear again, later.
After all the other boys had practiced and perfected those promises that came so easily to him.

A

I don't know if those promises came easily because he meant them,
or because he had said them so many times.

DETECTIVE

There haven't been any missings in quite some time.
The last one took place within a year after you returned.

WENDY

What about missings in other places?

DETECTIVE

None that follow his pattern.

WENDY

What was his pattern?

DETECTIVE

It doesn't matter anymore.

WENDY

Of course it matters.
Everything matters.

C

Everything sounded so new then.

B

He said he'd be back. He said I should wait.

DETECTIVE

You sabotaged things.
You gave your Doctor and your Therapist false information.
You slept with the window open – even though it gave you a cold –
Just In Case he came back.
Your mother put a lock on it – you broke the lock.
No one knew how.

WENDY

I was a child.
I didn't know any better.

DETECTIVE

Children know more than we give them credit for.

A

He's just a boy.

That's what I would say to myself, if I were someone other than myself.

WENDY

Please.
Please, I –
Help me.

Pause.
The Detective takes note of the
change in Wendy. He softens.

DETECTIVE

If I were you
I'd start with the letters.

A, B, C, and D put letters everywhere.
In boxes, underneath floorboards,
outside the window, on laundry lines.

DOCTOR

People mail all kinds of letters to all kinds of places.

BOY

To all kinds of people.

DETECTIVE

A name with no address.

THERAPIST

Addresses that don't exist.

DOCTOR

Santa Claus – The North Pole.

THERAPIST

Peter Pan – Neverland.

BOY

Second star to the right.

DETECTIVE

Straight on 'til morning.

D
He said once that he didn't get any letters
So I thought it might be nice for him to get one now.

B
I wrote you a letter, did you get it?

C
If you got it, did you read it?

A
If you read it, what did you think?

D
Did you think anything at all?

B
Did you think it was stupid?

C
Did you think less of me for sending it?

D
Maybe you didn't get it.

B
I'll send another one.

A
Put more stamps on it this time.

C
Print the return address very clearly.

D
Use my neatest handwriting
So you don't get lost when you come back.

B
So you can find me.

A
So you can find me.

C

So you can find me.

D

So you can find me.

Wendy gathers an armful of letters.

As Wendy talks to the girls, they are all onstage at the same time, but their conversations happen in different times and places.

Callie hangs clothes on a laundry line. Nina has a tape-recorder and notebook.

Cora might smoke a cigarette or read the newspaper.

Wendy approaches Callie.

She checks the address on an envelope against the building outside of which Callie stands.

WENDY

What are you doing?

CALLIE

Hanging clothes.

WENDY

Those are already dry.

CALLIE

I like the smell of the breeze on my clothes.

WENDY

But those are boys' clothes.
Do you have a boyfriend?

CALLIE

No.

WENDY

A brother?

CALLIE
No.

WENDY
A father?

CALLIE
No.

WENDY
Then who are those clothes for?

Silence.

I do the same thing.
I leave some clothes on the line for him, just in case.
A coat, if it's cold.
Some shirts, some pants – there were always holes in his, and he doesn't
know how to fix them.

CORA
Why are you making such a big deal out of this?
Didn't you have fun?

WENDY
I did.

CORA
Wasn't it magical?

WENDY
It was magical, but it's not anymore.

CORA
Most people never experience magic at all.
Most people never fly.
How lucky are we?

Nina clutches a flier.

NINA
Excuse me!
Hi!

Wendy!
Wendy Darling!
Oh my goodness I can't believe it's really you.
I have read everything about you since forever.

WENDY

I don't have time right now, I'm sorry.

NINA

No, wait –
I saw your flier.
And I have information you want.
I promise.
I just
Can I ask you some questions first?

CORA

We had something most people only read about in books.
I mean, he didn't force me to go.
He didn't even offer at first.
I asked.
I bet you did, too.
Didn't you?

Beat.

That's what I thought.

CALLIE

There was this
Look
In his eyes once I asked.
It should have made me question everything.
But it didn't.

NINA

Okay. So.
I'm doing this paper on you.
Not on you, like, specifically you.
People like you.

WENDY

What kind of people?

NINA

You know.
Like.
Kidnapped people.

WENDY

Oh.
Well, that's not what I am.

NINA

That's actually a really common attitude.
Like.
People always think they're the exception, they never think they're the norm.
Isn't that interesting?

WENDY

But there *is* always an exception.
Right?

NINA

Sometimes things are exactly how they seem.
I like that.
I like it when things just
Are.

Anyway.
No one's talked to you in any official capacity
besides the police, right?
No interviews. No press conference.

WENDY

Just my friends.
The Lost Boys.

NINA

(an attempted joke)

I guess they're not lost anymore.

...

I interviewed a couple of them, too.

WENDY

Oh.
They didn't tell me.

NINA

They're super fascinating
and I know that's like a big reason why you're so famous, bringing them back
the way you did, but my paper is really supposed to focus on female victims.

WENDY

I'm not a victim.

NINA

Okay.

WENDY

I'm not.

NINA

Of course. I didn't mean to –

WENDY

Just ask the questions or whatever.

NINA

Sure.
Yes.

Were you scared?

WENDY

No.
Yes.

NINA

Tell me about the first time you saw him.

CALLIE

I know who you are.
You're Wendy Darling, aren't you?
Your hair's different. It used to be so long.
I remember that picture they used when you were gone.

WENDY

It was a long time ago.

CALLIE

But your eyes are the same.

WENDY

Eyes are always the same.
From when you're born until you die.

CALLIE

That's a myth, actually.
They grow until you're about thirteen.
They stop and everything else starts.

NINA

We're almost the exact same age, did you know that?
Of course you didn't know that, you just met me.
Two days apart.
I'm younger.
So when it happened –
When he took you –
Your face was everywhere, you and your brothers.
And my mom really hammered that point home, you know?
As a cautionary tale.
“You think you're so grown-up and can take care of yourself?
This girl is only two days older than you, and look what happened to her –
Snatched right up.”

CORA

It's really childish, that you blame him.

WENDY

I'm not childish.
I'm grown up now.

CORA

But you don't want to be.
You're all slouchy and scared about it.
Sit up [*or “stand up,” dependent on staging*] straight and be a woman.

CALLIE

Did he come back for you?

WENDY

He said he would.

CALLIE
He said a lot of things.

NINA
I remember seeing your picture
And thinking
“That girl looks like she’d be my friend.”

WENDY
Did you leave anything there?

CALLIE
A sweater, I think?

WENDY
Do you miss it?

CALLIE
It wouldn’t fit anymore.

WENDY
But you miss it.

CALLIE
It’s just a sweater.

WENDY
Sweaters are important.

CALLIE
I have other sweaters.
I bought new ones I like even better.

WENDY
I left a kiss.

CALLIE
Oh.

WENDY
Well, I didn’t *leave* it, I gave it to him.
But now I need it back.

CALLIE

Oh.

WENDY

I'm going to get it.

CORA

You can't do that.

WENDY

Why not?

CORA

Because he's not there.

WENDY

Of course he is.

Cora shakes her head.

CORA

No.

He grew up.

Time stops.

Time speeds up.

Time fragments into a million pieces.

*Time puts itself back together and is
forever different than it was before.*

WENDY

How do you know that?

CORA

This girl.

She told me.

WENDY

How do you know she was telling the truth?

CORA

Because he was there.

She was with him.

With-him with him.

WENDY

Oh.

Pause.

Why did you write him a letter?
If he wasn't there to get it?

CORA

It wasn't a letter to him.
I mean, not really.
It was a letter to who he used to be, from who I used to be.

CALLIE

You're going to be fine.
I wasn't for a long time, and now I am.

Beat.
Wendy studies Callie.

WENDY

Why do you still leave clothes for him, if you're fine?

Wendy and Slightly in the Nursery.

SLIGHTLY

You're wasting your time, talking to these girls.
You're just treading water.
Because you're scared.

WENDY

I'm not scared.

SLIGHTLY

If you really want to find him, you have to go there.

WENDY

I can't fly anymore.
Not many happy thoughts.
And we're all out of pixie dust.
No fairies in sight.

SLIGHTLY

I thought of something –

Slightly produces a jar of fireflies.

WENDY

Fireflies?!

SLIGHTLY

They're not fairies, but they might work.
I still don't think finding him is a good idea
But if that's what you want to do...

*He takes one out, squashing it to get
its luminescence.*

WENDY

Don't kill it!

SLIGHTLY

Bugs have very short lives, and at least this way they have purpose.

WENDY

I'm not going.
There's been a change of plans.
He –

*Slightly interrupts Wendy by taking
her face in his hands to wipe some of
the light on her face, gently.
He lets his hand hover for a moment
longer than he should.*

SLIGHTLY

Do you feel any floatier?

WENDY

Not really.

Beat.

SLIGHTLY

Wendy.
I have something I want to tell you.
Before you fly away.

WENDY

I'm not flying anywhere.
I told you.

SLIGHTLY

Hey.
I think about you.
All the time.

WENDY

Because we're together like, all the time.

SLIGHTLY

That's not why.

I don't think about you the way I think about anyone else.

You are so wonderful, sometimes I feel like I could drown.
Do you know what I mean?

Beat.
Wendy grabs the jar of fireflies and
studies it so that she has something to
do with her hands.

WENDY

It's not working.

SLIGHTLY

...maybe it has to – kick in – or something.
Did you hear what I said, though?

WENDY

It's not going to work! I'm not going there! Flying isn't real anymore!

...I did hear you.
Thank you.
But this is hardly the time or the place to talk about anything like that.
Besides, I'm not even that wonderful.
It's just an idea you've got in your head for some reason.

SLIGHTLY

For a lot of reasons.
And it's not just an idea.

You
Shine.
I –
Have you ever
Thought about it?
Thought about me?

Beat.

WENDY

You know too much.
There's nowhere to hide.

SLIGHTLY

I think that's a good thing.

He steps closer to her.

WENDY
(to stop him)

He grew up.
Peter grew up.
Did you know that?

SLIGHTLY

...yes.

WENDY

Oh.

SLIGHTLY

I didn't know what good it would do.
To tell you.

WENDY

Well
I found out on my own.
I don't need your help.
I don't need you.

*She hands him the jar of fireflies.
She does not look at him.*

A

If I saw him now...

D

I would cry.

I used to be able to control my tears, but I can't anymore.

C

I'd probably drop something.

I wouldn't mean to.

It just happens.

B

Maybe I'd hit him.

No, I wouldn't.

I'd want to.

No.

Not really.

A little.

A

I meet these boys

These stupid, ordinary boys

Who think they can charm me by wearing a tie to dinner
and giving me flowers.

A bouquet of dead plants for my affections.

I feel sorry for them.

Teach me to fly – then we'll talk.

B

When he was still here, flying didn't seem like enough.

Now it seems like everything.

D

It was around the time I stopped caring if my shoes were comfortable.

C

I told him stories.

I wanted him to see –

There is a world inside me, too.

There is a world that has nothing to do with you.

But he always liked the stories about him the best.

*Wendy's Mother sits by Wendy's bed
in the Nursery. Wendy comes in.*

WENDY

It looks different in here. Did you paint the walls?

MOTHER

No, dear.

WENDY

Oh.
They look –
Painted.

MOTHER

It's wallpaper, dear.

WENDY

Maybe that's it.

MOTHER

The same wallpaper since before you were born, dear.

WENDY

You keep saying that word, and it's starting to sound like nothing.

MOTHER

I made your bed earlier.

WENDY

You didn't have to do that.

MOTHER

Extra tight, the way you like it.
Wrapped up like a mummy.

WENDY

I don't like that anymore.

MOTHER

Since when?

WENDY

Since it started feeling like a trap.

MOTHER

Well then, I'll loosen it.

Pause.

Mother begins to pack.

WENDY

You don't need to do that.

Mother continues to pack.

MOTHER

I was thinking we could go away this weekend.
Just the two of us.

WENDY

Why?

MOTHER

For my birthday.

Beat.

WENDY

Oh.

MOTHER

You forgot.

Silence.

MOTHER

How are your friends doing?

WENDY

My friends?
You mean the boys you practically raised?
Those friends?

MOTHER

They're not in any sort of trouble, are they?

WENDY

No trouble.

They're all doing great.

MOTHER

That's wonderful to hear.
They're always welcome, I love to see them
But.
I do wish you would let me know when they sleep over.

WENDY

They're family.
It shouldn't be a big deal.

MOTHER

Actually, they're not family.
They're dear friends, and I care about them very much.
But they're not family.

WENDY

They're my family.

MOTHER

I'm your family.
But I'm sure you would have never forgotten Toodles's birthday.
Or Nibs, or Curly, or any of them.

WENDY

Slightly.

MOTHER

What?

WENDY

You're missing Slightly.

MOTHER

The point is, Wendy, that you need some emotional boundaries.
You give things too much importance.

WENDY

Somebody's back in therapy.
"Emotional boundaries."
God.

Silence.

What.

MOTHER

I didn't say anything.

WENDY

But you want to.

MOTHER

I saw your fliers.

Why on earth are you looking for him?

WENDY

I need closure.

MOTHER

Sometimes we have to move on without closure.

Things aren't always tied up neatly in this life.

WENDY

Did you know there were other girls?

Beat.

MOTHER

I did.

WENDY

Why didn't you tell me?

MOTHER

I didn't know how.

WENDY

Everyone knew but me.

I feel so stupid.

MOTHER

I thought it would hurt you.

I know you – clung to the idea of being the only one.

Being special.

WENDY

You're right.
I did.
But it turns out I never was.

He has something of mine.
Peter.

MOTHER

What does he have?

WENDY

My kiss.

MOTHER

Your kiss.

WENDY

Why didn't you ever give yours away?

MOTHER

What do you mean?

WENDY

Your kiss.
It's right there.
Everyone can see.
Some people might pretend they can't out of politeness, but they can.
I'm old enough now, you can tell me.

MOTHER

It wasn't that I didn't want to give it away.
I tried.
It just has a mind of its own.

A

I met him when we were both very young and enchanted with the possibilities of our lives.

WENDY

I don't believe that.
Or else it would have gone away when you were young and foolish and didn't know better.

C

We shaped one another and consumed one another the way that only very young people can.

MOTHER

Every kiss is different, I suppose.

WENDY

Not even to dad, though?

MOTHER

I tried. I really did.

I wish –

Sometimes I wish I was more like you.

*Wendy and the Boys, minus Slightly.
The Boys pack Nursery items into the
cardboard boxes, which are now
mostly assembled, while Wendy writes
something in a notebook.*

NIBS

You're right – I *did* want to spend my afternoon packing things that aren't mine – how did you know?

WENDY

I'll help in a minute, I'm just –

I have to keep track of the different stories I'm getting from the different girls.

TOODLES

How is that
Going?

WENDY

Progress is being made.

CURLY

Are you
Okay?

WENDY

Yes.

Yes!

Just because I don't tell you guys everything doesn't mean I'm not okay!

You don't tell me everything.
You don't tell me about the other girls
You don't tell me you've been giving interviews
You don't tell me he grew up
Apparently you don't tell me much of anything
But that doesn't mean *you're* not okay
So stop asking me if *I'm* okay just because I'm not telling you everything.

Pause.

TOODLES

Hey, Wendy?
Can I ask you something?
...
Actually, I don't know if it's a question.

WENDY

Go ahead.

TOODLES

Remember when we were in Neverland?

WENDY

...I do.

TOODLES

And do you remember when you asked us to come back here with you and grow up?

WENDY

Those are both questions so far.

TOODLES

Yeah!
I don't know what to say now.

CURLY

Just keep going, you're doing great.

TOODLES

Well like, when you asked us?
You seemed so confident?
You made growing up seem like a really great thing?

And I mean, it is.
Most of the time.
I like driving cars and buying things and eating ice cream when I want.
Even when it's not great, I'm still glad we came back with you.
But
You just seem really mad and sad most of the time.
You never tell us stories anymore.
You don't seem like you want to be here or grow up or anything, really.

Beat.

WENDY

Sorry.

TOODLES

That's okay.

WENDY

Everything was different in my head than it was actually doing it.

NIBS

Yeah, but you've had a long time to adjust.
And out of everybody, you already had the most experience growing up.
So why are we still so much better at it?

WENDY

I don't think you can be "better" at something like growing up.
There aren't any grades.

NIBS

I mean, there kind of are.
I exercise.
I eat well.
I have hobbies.
I have friends who aren't you guys.
You don't do or have any of that.

WENDY

That's a really mean thing to say.

NIBS

It's just the truth.

WENDY

The truth can be mean.

NIBS

No, I don't think so.
The truth is the truth.
The truth is facts.
Facts don't have emotions.

CURLY

We just don't like seeing you sad
All the time.

WENDY

If I stop being sad, I stop remembering him.
It hurts to remember, but it hurts more to forget.

TOODLES

But if you forget, how do you know if it hurts?
You don't.
Because you forgot.

WENDY

Memories are all we have to fill us up inside.
When we forget, we empty out.
And now that he's grown up –
I thought it was a bad thing at first
I thought what I wanted was my kiss back
But I want more than that.
When I find him, we can be together.

Beat.

CURLY

Wendy, this is exhausting.

WENDY

What is?

NIBS

You.

Beat.

WENDY

Is this about Slightly?
Are you mad at me because I don't want to be with him instead?

CURLY

Nobody's mad.

NIBS

I'm a little mad.

CURLY

That isn't useful right now, Nibs.

NIBS

No one is better than Slightly.

CURLY

I know that.

TOODLES

We just think
Maybe
It would help you grow up if you weren't around us so much.

WENDY

No.
No!
You're wrong!
I need you.

TOODLES

We also think
Maybe
It would help *us* if you weren't around us so much.

CURLY

You need to need us a little less.

WENDY

Oh.

CURLY

We want to help you
But only if you really want to be helped.

NIBS

Unless
You're ready to be done with everything.
No more Peter.

Pause.

WENDY

I can't.

TOODLES

Oh, Wendy.

NIBS

I told you.

*They leave.
Wendy does not move.*

A

They left.

B

Those boys.

C

Just like her father.

D

Just like her brothers.

B

Just like Peter.

A

But she left Peter, remember?
To come back here.

B

He was supposed to come back.
He didn't.

A

Will they come back?

C

Those Boys?

THERAPIST

Everyone leaves her.

D

Why?

DETECTIVE

There's no real reason.

A

There are a lot of reasons.

DOCTOR

Maybe it's her fault.

B

What will she do now?

BOY

Poor thing.

C

I feel sorry for her.

DETECTIVE

Don't.

Wendy and Nina in the Nursery.

NINA

I know I owe you some information.

I just thought it would really add an extra something to my paper
if I got a sense of the environment.

Where it happened.

WENDY

It's nice that you're here.

It's been a little quiet lately.

Plus the only girl I see regularly is my mother.

NINA

Why is that?

WENDY

I think I'm scared of them.
Girls.

NINA

You're a girl.
Are you scared of yourself?

WENDY

I mean
I had two brothers.
My mom and I were never close.
Then the boys came back with me.
There was a safety in being the only one.
I like feeling special.

NINA

Is that why you never found out about the others?

WENDY

I didn't purposefully not find out about them.

Do you have other questions, or something?

Beat.

NINA

You were there for nine days?
In "Neverland"?

WENDY

Time works differently there –
The seasons?
It's always winter when he's gone.
Even if he just flies away for the night.
So it was longer there.
Years.

NINA

Or so it felt.

WENDY

Or so it felt.

Beat.

NINA

It must have been a hard adjustment.

WENDY

It was.

NINA

Everyone knowing who you were and all.
Cover of every newspaper.
Talk of the town.
And you haven't seen him since?

WENDY

No.

NINA

Not even recently?

WENDY

That's the whole point.
That's why I've been talking to you.
You told me you could help.

NINA

The last time you saw him, did he say/ anything about —?

WENDY

He said he would come back.
He said I should wait.

NINA

You never saw him in passing, on the street?

WENDY

I've had a lot of false alarms.
I thought I saw him once on the train.
But he doesn't take trains.

He flies.

NINA

Not if he grew up.

WENDY

Oh.

I guess you're right.

It's hard to imagine him on a train.

He's so impatient.

Trains are so slow.

NINA

I don't know why he never came back for you.

He talked about you all the time.

WENDY

Wait.

What?

NINA

You weren't first.

You weren't last.

Either of those would be easier to understand.

WENDY

You talk to him?

NINA

Talked.

Past tense.

Every day

For years.

WENDY

I'm

Confused.

So you went there too?

NINA

No.

He asked me to, but I wasn't up for it.

I'm very delicate.

I don't like adventure.
But I liked him.
So I convinced him to stay.

WENDY

How did you do that?

NINA

I asked him.

WENDY

So did I.

NINA

I had never felt those kinds of feelings.
They were so big, it felt dangerous.
I thought we didn't have secrets.
I knew all about Neverland, and I knew all about you.
I knew about the others.
But then he just –
Left.
I couldn't find him, I couldn't reach him, I –
When I saw your flier...
When I realized who you were...
I thought he had gone to find you.
You were there.
You know what it was like.
What he was like.
I can listen to stories every day, but I'll never really know.

Beat.

WENDY

It was just a place where a bunch of kids played pretend.

NINA

It was more than that.
You're just being nice.

Pause.

WENDY

What's he like?
Now?

NINA

He's not going to be what you think.

WENDY

What if he is?

NINA

Nothing stays the same forever.

A

I got a splinter in my foot one time.
It hurt so bad, but I pretended like it didn't.
My favorite was pretending.

C

But you can only pretend so long.
There weren't any grown-ups.
Nobody knew how to get the splinter out.
It hurt **to** walk.
It hurt to run.

B

Running was my favorite.
Living in a city, you don't get to run that way –
We tore through the forest like we were being chased.

A

But sometimes we *were* being chased.
And sometimes we got caught.
It was so scary.

WENDY

I missed home.
I missed my room.
I started to forget the way my mother smelled, and I was afraid of what else I
was capable of forgetting.

I liked flying the best, but not for the reasons you'd think.
I didn't like going up.
I liked coming down.
The certainty of the ground.

Wendy and Slightly.
The Nursery is becoming more empty.

WENDY

You don't have to help me pack.
I can do it by myself.

SLIGHTLY

I know you can.

More packing.
More silence.

SLIGHTLY

It looks so sad in here.

WENDY

Rooms can't be sad.

SLIGHTLY

Of course they can.
Your last night in the Nursery...
I remember my *first* night in the Nursery –
When we came back with you.
I thought this room was the happiest place I'd ever been.

WENDY

That's so silly.
Think about where you came here from.

SLIGHTLY

I do.
This is better.
[Because this is where you are.]

Beat.

WENDY

Have you talked to them lately?

SLIGHTLY

I have.
They're good.
They miss you.

WENDY

You could have gone with them.

SLIGHTLY

I know.

WENDY

Why did you come back?
I was horrible to you.

SLIGHTLY

Because I promised.
After your dad left.
Do you remember?
I said I'd never leave you.
[And I never will.]

A moment.
Wendy nods.
They keep packing.
Quiet.
Slightly picks up some clothes.
Stops.

SLIGHTLY

Whose are these?

WENDY

Mine.

SLIGHTLY

No
They're not.

WENDY

You don't know all my clothes.

SLIGHTLY

Yes
I do.
Wendy.
Are these
For him?

WENDY

...

Just in case he needs them.

SLIGHTLY

He doesn't, though.

He doesn't need you to leave him clothes.

He doesn't need you.

Period.

WENDY

Look.

I know you like me.

Or whatever.

But just because you're jealous doesn't mean you can try and stop me from doing what I need to do.

SLIGHTLY

I am not trying to stop you.

I am trying to help you.

WENDY

It doesn't feel like help.

And even if it was, which it's not, no one is asking you to help.

I can do stuff by myself.

SLIGHTLY

I know you can.

WENDY

Good.

SLIGHTLY

But I know you're scared.

WENDY

I'm not scared.

Why would I be scared?

SLIGHTLY

I think we're all scared.

All the time.

Every Time I look at you, I'm terrified.

You make me so mad, and so sad, and so confused.
But I wish I could drink the air you breathe.
Those are big, scary feelings to feel
But I feel them.

WENDY

I want to feel those things too, but I can't!
That is what I'm trying to do!
Once I find him and we –
Once I have my kiss back –
Someday maybe I –
When I can feel new things –

*Slightly grabs Wendy and kisses her.
Hard. Long.*

SLIGHTLY

I felt that.
And I bet you did, too.

*He leaves.
Wendy is alone.*

A long quiet.

WENDY

Did you hear –?
Do you know –?
That girl –
Wendy –
Not her again –
What about her –?
I'm sick of her.
All these years –
All that waiting –
All this looking –
She said she couldn't Feel, but she lied.
She could
and she did
and it was scary.
It was too scary.
It was easier to Hide.

She hid behind a lot of things.

She hid behind her thoughts –
She hid behind her memories –
She hid behind those Boys –
But now they're gone.
Just like everyone else.
Why?
Because of her.
What did she do?
So many things.
I feel sorry for her.
Don't.

One of them kissed her, they say.
He had wanted to for years, they say.
And when he did, she realized –
She realized sooner than that, didn't she?
She had to –
She didn't want to –
He kissed her
And she knew she was wrong.
He kissed her
And she felt it.
And she felt things
She never had before.
Not even with Peter.

But that's impossible.
She thinks about Peter all the time.
She's obsessed with remembering.
I hate to forget.

Beat.

I give myself eight minutes a day to think about him.
Uninterrupted. Without feeling guilty or mad at myself.
It seems a reasonable amount of time –
Eight is my favorite number.
I've whittled it down over the years.
Maybe one day it'll be five minutes.
Then two.
Then no minutes at all.

He said come away with me
He said forever

I said
That's an awfully long time
and I guess I thought we were just saying pretty words
Even though it felt big and real.
We were kids, you know.
Kids say things.
He was a boy.
I was a girl.
Boys make big promises.
Girls know better than to believe them,
but they go along with them anyway.

I went along with him anyway.

It doesn't matter when I first saw him.
Before I saw him, I was making him up.
The last time I saw him, he said he'd be back.
He said I should wait.
And I did.
I do.
Because he said I should.
But I can't anymore.
I won't.

*Peter has entered without Wendy
seeing.*

PETER

Why not?

*Wendy startles, but does her best to
hide it.*

*A long pause.
Peter is not the kind of person who
feels the need to fill silences.*

Wendy collects herself.

*From the moment Peter enters, the
very air is different, somehow.*

*Things slow down.
An atmosphere of glass.*

PETER

I heard you were looking for me.

WENDY

How.

PETER

The stars were talking about it one night.

WENDY

No, they weren't.

PETER

Maybe you forgot how to listen to stars.

You used to know.

They liked you better than me.

They still ask about you.

I thought I saw you

A week or two ago.

And another time, a month before that.

I thought I heard my name on the street

Once or twice.

It sounded like your voice.

WENDY

So it's true.

You grew up.

PETER

So did you.

WENDY

You knew that already.

PETER

It's different seeing it.

WENDY

You said you wouldn't.

PETER

I changed my mind.

WENDY

How?

PETER

It just happened.

WENDY

Why?

PETER

I just did.

WENDY

When?

PETER

I'm not good at keeping track of time.

WENDY

Those aren't answers.

PETER

Not the answers you want.

Beat.

WENDY

How's your shadow?

PETER

My shadow?

WENDY

That's how we met, remember?

It flew away, and you were sad, and I fixed it for you.

PETER

Oh.

I forgot about that.

WENDY

I thought that's how you'd remember me –
The girl who fixed your shadow.

PETER

I don't need help remembering you.

Beat.

It was just a trick.
I wanted to get closer to you. Make you talk to me.
And I was scared to ask.

WENDY

You never seemed scared to me.

PETER

I'm good at pretending.

Beat.

WENDY

How did you get in here?
I thought the door was locked.

PETER

Locks can't keep me out.

WENDY

That's what they're for.

PETER

What happened to your imagination?

WENDY

I got rid of it.

PETER

That was a silly thing to do.

WENDY

Your eyes are different.

PETER

They changed color.

Why? WENDY

I don't know.
I'll ask them. PETER

Don't make fun of me. WENDY

Oh, Wendy.
I'm not. PETER
(*sincere*)

Beat.

I think you should leave. WENDY

You've been looking for me, and now I'm here.
Why would you want me to leave? PETER

I changed my mind.
Like you changed yours. WENDY

No, you didn't.
You're just scared. PETER

Don't tell me what I am.
Please go. WENDY

I don't want to. PETER

Well, I want you to.
And my wants are just as important as yours.
And this is my house. WENDY

PETER

It's your parents' house.
I remember the wallpaper.
Why are you still here?
Aren't you supposed to leave?
Find a new place to live?
Isn't that part of growing up?

WENDY

I *am* leaving.
And you don't get to ask me those questions.

PETER

I have one.
A place to live.

WENDY

Where is it?

PETER

Ah, somewhere.
I'm not good with the names of things.

WENDY

You can't remember where you live?
That's not cute.
That's troubling.

PETER

You're no fun.

WENDY

I'm plenty of fun when I want to be.
You don't know me anymore.

PETER

Can you please be sweet to me?
Just a little?
You make me nervous.

Beat.

WENDY

I met
Her.

PETER

That's good.
I think she's wanted to meet you for a long time.
She knows how much you meant to me.

WENDY

Why does she get to know that?
I don't even know how much I meant to you.

PETER

You do, too.
You know.

Beat.

WENDY

She told me you wouldn't be what I think you are.

PETER

What do you think I am?

WENDY

Why did you choose her?

PETER

I don't know.
Lots of reasons.

It was time.
It was getting harder to fly.
I kept remembering things.
To fly, you have to forget.

It was a windy night.
I was tired by the time I got to her window.
She was wearing yellow flannel pajamas, with the tiniest flowers on them.

She asked me to stay.
It sounded nice.

WENDY
I asked you to stay.

PETER
Did you?

WENDY
I begged.

PETER
I don't remember that.
I do remember you wanting to come back here.
I remember you leaving.
I remember everyone leaving.

I remember being lonely.

And for a while that was fine.
But then...

Beat.

WENDY
You said you'd come back.
I waited.

PETER
I know.

Beat.

WENDY
How many other windows did you go to?
In the dead of night, when parents were asleep?

PETER
I went to your window.

WENDY
It doesn't matter.
It didn't mean anything.

PETER

Maybe not to you.

WENDY

Of course it meant something to me!
I was talking about you.
I didn't even stay long.

PETER

You could have stayed as long as you wanted.
Your nightgown was the softest blue I'd ever seen.

WENDY

You were covered in dirt.
There are stains in the carpet that never came out.
You never even apologized.

PETER

I'm sorry.

WENDY

It doesn't matter now.

PETER

Everything matters, Wendy.
I learned that from you.

Beat.

I'm sorry I hurt you.
But you've hurt me plenty, too.

Beat.

WENDY

I think you have something that belongs to me.

PETER

What?

WENDY

I think you know.

PETER

...I don't.

WENDY
You *must* know.

PETER
You must be mistaken.

WENDY
I need it back.
I need my kiss.

PETER
Your kiss?

Oh.

No.
You can't have that.

WENDY
Why not?

PETER
Because it's mine.
Because you gave it to me.

WENDY
I changed my mind.

PETER
You can't do that.

WENDY
You changed your mind about growing up.

PETER
I didn't give that to you.

WENDY
You've had it for a very long time.
Now it's time to give it back.

PETER

But I need it.

WENDY

Peter.

PETER

Wendy.

Darling.

Your name is still so pretty to say.

...

The truth is.

I used it.

Used it all up.

Beat.

WENDY

There must be something of it left.

Just a drop.

PETER

No.

Nothing.

You'll have to get one somewhere else.

People are awfully careless with their kisses.

They leave them lying around everywhere.

WENDY

Those aren't mine.

PETER

But if you take some from different people, you can put them all together

And after a while, it makes something new.

WENDY

I can't do that.

PETER

Wendy, that's what everyone does.

WENDY

I'm not everyone.

PETER

It's kind of nice.
You can't get back everything you give
But you keep giving.
You keep taking.
And then you make something new
So other people can take from that and make something new, too.

Beat.

WENDY

But I thought there was One Kiss.
One that was more special than the rest.

PETER

I don't know.
Maybe there is.
Or maybe that's just what people say.

Pause.

WENDY

Do you think I'm stupid for believing it all?
Just some stupid, gullible girl?

PETER

I never thought you were stupid.
Didn't then, haven't since.

WENDY

I think I was stupid.

PETER

I think you were brave and remarkable.
Maybe a touch bossy, but always tender.
And never, ever stupid.

I didn't even know what kisses *were*.
You knew so much.
So many stories.

I always felt like you'd realize how empty I was compared to everything
inside you.

WENDY

You're not empty.

Beat.

PETER

Hey.

WENDY

What.

PETER

I'm sorry I don't have your kiss anymore.

Beat.

WENDY
(*an idea*)

Make it up to me.

PETER

How?

WENDY

By giving me a new one.

I
Need to get the other one out of my head.
End on something different.

Beat.

PETER

Okay.

WENDY

Okay?
You won't want it back?

PETER

Of course I will.
I'll think about it.
Wonder how it's doing.
But as much as I'll want it back, I'll want you to keep it even more than that.

Come here.

WENDY

No.

You come to me this time.

He goes to her.

*They are very close.
A moment.*

PETER

What are you going to do with it?

*Beat.
Wendy thinks.*

WENDY

What you did with mine.
Give it to somebody else.

I mean
I'll try.
I get scared.

PETER

Me too.
Just pretend you're not.

WENDY

No.
I think it's okay to be scared.

*Wendy reaches out and traces Peter's
jaw lightly with her fingertip, then
retracts her hand.*

*Peter touches Wendy's face.
Her hair.*

*They kiss.
It is soft and simple.*

WENDY

Oh.

PETER

What?

WENDY
(smiling)

Nothing.

Beat.

Goodbye.

PETER

Are you sure?

WENDY

Yes.

*After a moment, Peter leaves.
He wants to look back, but he doesn't look
back.*

Wendy is very still.

She looks around the room.

*She packs a box.
This should take as long as it takes.*

*She looks at the open window.
Breathes in the breeze.*

She walks to the window, and closes it.

She leaves.

End of play.

Gondal

a play by Kimberly Belflower

for two wild women -
Liz Engelman
and Gail Jones

with special thanks to
Bruno-Pierre Houle, William Glick, Kevin Poole, and Adam Sussman

CHARACTERS

Haworth, England – 1833

Emily Brontë – F, 15ish. Intense, independent. Wild.

Charlotte Brontë – F, 17ish. Bossy as a necessity, with a fervent moral compass.

Anne Brontë – F, 14ish. Amenable and sincere, has gotten good at self-control.

Branwell Brontë – M, 16ish. Passionate, erratic, tortured.

A small suburb of a major American city – 2015

Lainey – F, 15ish. Obsessive, sensitive. Wild.

Amber – F, 15ish. Loyal, sweet. Pretty.

Vanessa – F, 16ish. Weird, fun. Up for anything.

Luke – M, 16ish. Dreamy. Has a good heart. Plays hacky-sack unironically.

Everywhere, always

Slender Man – M, ageless. Non-speaking/movement-based. Ominous, seductive.

Kimberly – F, 30-35. The playwright. Emotional, resilient. Wild.

A NOTE

The space should evoke an expansiveness and a claustrophobia. It should allow for lots of movement, projection, and change. The worlds in this play bleed into each other until they are fully one. This bleed should make a mess and take time. Unless noted, transitions aren't made with a blackout or by simply moving furniture – they're part of the world itself.

PRONUNCIATION

Brontë = BRON-tay

Haworth = HOW-worth

Gondal = GAHN-dull

"we didn't want to go, we didn't want to kill them, but its persistent silence and outstretched arms horrified and comforted us at the same time..."

- the origin of Slender Man, by Victor Surge, Something Awful forum, 2009

*"Every single night
I endure the flight
Of little wings of white-flamed
Butterflies in my brain
These ideas of mine
Percolate the mind
Trickle down the spine
Swarm the belly, swelling to a blaze
That's where the pain comes in
Like a second skeleton
Trying to fit beneath the skin
I can't fit the feelings in
Every single night's alight with my brain"*

-Fiona Apple, "Every Single Night"

*"But in between the neighbour who recalls her
coming in from a walk on the moors
with her face "lit up by a divine light"*

*and the sister who tells us
Emily never made a friend in her life,
is a space where the little raw soul*

*slips through.
It goes skimming the deep keel like a storm petrel,
out of sight.*

The little raw soul was caught by no one."
-Anne Carson, "The Glass Essay"

ONE: DIRECTIONS.

KIMBERLY

Here's how you get there.

You go

Up the hill to the right of the house

My parents are selling the house.

My parents are selling the barn and the pasture and the garden and the arbor with the roses and the creek and the dead patch of land where the trampoline once was.

My parents are selling the potting shed I joked about living in someday, and when I did, my mom said "Well, it's big enough for you, and that's all you have," and she didn't hear how that sounded, she never does, and I never tell her.

My parents are selling the house.

The one we built with our hands.

When we bought the land, before there was a house, it seemed impossible that there could ever be one – the woods were too wild and thick – but we did it.

We tamed the wild and thinned the trees.

When I meet someone

If I meet someone –

Will they understand me if they don't know what kind of home I come from?

the dirt under my fingernails from the potatoes I dug from the ground

the grass and gravel beneath my bare feet

the pride I took in my summer callouses

the mud and the algae in the lakes

the toads lining the driveway after a big rain

the berries I picked and ate and the scrapes on my arms to show for the effort

the splinters from porches and docks and rocking chairs and wooden swings and floors of old cabins and shovels and fences

the chimney in the woods from a long-forgotten house, falling apart but still standing.

I spent hours at the foot of that chimney, days once you added up all the hours, and I never told anyone. No one besides my dogs, who came with me and sat at my feet. I was the only one who knew it existed at all.

I always imagined taking someone there, someone who mattered, someone who Understood. I was saving it for them.

And now the stones from that chimney will fall down someday, one by one, until they dissolve into the earth or become smaller stones or become overgrown with moss and covered with leaves, and either someone else will know they exist or no one else will know they exist.

But it won't be because of me.

Here's how you get there.

You go

Up the hill to the right of the house.

Down past the trees with the vines –

be careful for poison ivy

Through the creek –

wear shoes built for water unless you want to get wet

Onto the old logging trail.

Follow it straight and look carefully through the forest for the sun hitting the stones and then there you are.

There it is.

She looks around.

The sound of rushing water.

Wind. A faint droning noise. Low strings. The flapping of wings.

TWO: THE MOORS

It's open and windy and wild.

Haworth, England. 1833.

We hear the wind.

We hear the wildness.

We see miles and miles of the relentless landscape.

Heather blooms. Rocks peek up from the ground.

The trees are permanently bent from years of withstanding the weather.

Fog.

Emily Brontë, dressed in black.

She scans the horizon.

A moment.

The wind blows harder.

Emily stands against it, arms outstretched.

OFFSTAGE VOICE
(CHARLOTTE, ANNE, BRANWELL)

Emily!

Emily, where are you?

Emily!

Emily!

Emily!

The voices become distorted and echo-y. They fade away.

Wind.

Emily sits down and finds a spider.

EMILY

Hello.

You're a spider.

I'm a girl.

I could kill you right now and it would be very easy.

Wind.

There are lots of ways I could kill you.

I could step on you.

I could squish you between my fingers.

I could drown you in that puddle and let the tadpoles eat you.

I could do all three, just to be mean.

Emily holds the spider above the puddle.

The voices come back – in and out of being heard.

VOICE OF BRANWELL

Emily, it's / time!

VOICE OF ANNE

Emily, we / need you!

VOICE OF CHARLOTTE

Emily, they're / waiting!

EMILY

(to the spider)

My sisters are dead.

Two of them.

I have two more alive ones.
My mother is dead, too.
Did you know that?
Has the news spread to the spiders?

*Branwell Brontë enters, wearing black – out of breath, worried.
He sees Emily.
Emily sees him.
A moment.
He transforms his worry into a smile. He's good at transformation.*

BRANWELL
Charlotte seems to think we should be worried about you.

Emily says nothing.

I told her you just needed some time with your best friends
The wind and the rocks.

Emily plays with the spider, dropping it over the puddle and catching it at the last minute.

What've you got there.

EMILY
A spider.
We're watching tadpoles.

BRANWELL
Ah.
You know
Most girls like carriage rides and tea parties
instead of walking alone and playing with spiders.
But not *my* sister.

EMILY
Once upon a time
in another world
that tadpole over there *was* a spider

*He joins her to watch the tadpoles.
A moment.*

EMILY
That one's brave.

BRANWELL
Too brave.
I don't trust him.

EMILY
That one's weak.
It's hiding.
It's a coward.
You can't hide forever.
You can't hide from us.

BRANWELL
We see you.

EMILY
We're always watching.

Beat.

BRANWELL
You know we have to go back now.

Emily says nothing.

I don't want to either.
But we have to.

EMILY
Do you think spiders and octopuses are related?
They both have eight legs.

Enter Anne Brontë, skittish and scandalized, also wearing black.

ANNE
There you are.
Branwell, you *disappeared* and Charlotte's already so *mad* because of *Emily* and I was so *scared* you *know* I don't like being out here alone because of how I got *lost* that time and we were supposed to stay *together*.

EMILY
Anne, look at the tadpoles.

ANNE
Oh! How dear!

Anne moves in for a closer look at the tadpoles.

BRANWELL
Sweet Anne.

EMILY
What is my adjective?
If Anne is Sweet Anne
I'm what Emily?

BRANWELL
Octopus Emily

EMILY
That's not an adjective

BRANWELL
Adjectives are meant to describe
and I think "octopus" describes you perfectly well

*Enter Charlotte Brontë, also wearing black, focused and severe.
She clears her throat and takes a moment to let her presence change things before speaking,
looking at each sibling in turn.*

CHARLOTTE
Do you have any idea how this looks?
The entire congregation is at our family plot and our entire family is missing.
The funeral starts in ten minutes.

BRANWELL
Join us, Scary Charlotte!
We're watching tadpoles and playing with spiders.

ANNE
I'm sorry, sister, I just found them right now/ and –

EMILY
I don't want to go.
Everyone's going to be watching us
To make sure we're sad enough
or the Right Kind of Sad

and then they're going to ask us questions and eat our snacks
I hate the kinds of questions People ask
When can we stop being sad and go back to making up stories?

CHARLOTTE

Emily.

That's a terrible thing to say.

EMILY

They're dead.

We're not.

CHARLOTTE

Why don't we practice again?

EMILY

No, / I don't -

BRANWELL

Emily

Just do it

A beat.

He won't meet her eye.

EMILY

...

Hello

My name is Emily Brontë.

Thank you for coming.

CHARLOTTE

Good!

EMILY

How do you do.

CHARLOTTE

Very well, thank you for asking

It's lovely weather we're having, isn't it?

EMILY

No.

CHARLOTTE

Emily.

We're pretending.

EMILY

Pretending is supposed to be fun.

Like

Yesterday I met a man with tentacles instead of arms and he uses them to fly.

He harnesses clouds and rides them like horses

When you see him coming, your skin feels like nightmares

CHARLOTTE

Emily.

Remember what we talked about?

You're going to start talking about normal things

Nice things

Remember?

You're going to paint flowers and animals in your free time

Not skulls and sea creatures

BRANWELL

Aren't sea creatures animals, though?

CHARLOTTE

Nice animals

Cats and dogs and rabbits and birds

ANNE

Birds aren't nice.

They carry disease

and are just generally pretty spooky

BRANWELL

(dreamily)

Mrs. Robbins had a bird in her hat

last Sunday at church.

CHARLOTTE

You should practice not talking about Mrs. Robbins.

It's not proper.

BRANWELL

It's a crush.

It's harmless.

CHARLOTTE

There is Nothing harmless about a Crush.
Besides. She's married.
Her husband's offered you a job.
People will talk.

BRANWELL

People already talk.
About Father.
About us.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.
"They're so strange."
That's what they say.
"Whatever will they do?"
And do you know what will shut them up?
If we stop being strange and we start doing something.

I'm the oldest now.
And I'm going to make some changes.

EMILY

Isn't that Father's job?

CHARLOTTE

When was the last time you saw Father do anything productive for us?
We need to go to school
and have skills
and work

ANNE

Then love
Then a family

CHARLOTTE

That's all extra.
If you're lucky and you try hard.
It doesn't just happen.

EMILY

I don't want to go to school or do any of that.
I want to do something else.

CHARLOTTE

We can't.

We're girls.

We have to make ourselves fit.

Here are the ways a lady can fit:

Wear the right thing

Say as little as possible

Have an artistic skill like piano-playing or drawing or poetry for entertaining

Know the Bible –

Have a reasonable skill like teaching or
well

pretty much there's only teaching unless you marry well so let's all try to marry
well

EMILY

What about the ways a boy can fit?

CHARLOTTE

It would be easier to list the ways he can't.

EMILY

(to Branwell)

You're lucky.

BRANWELL

I know.

I'm sorry.

EMILY

(way more intense than the situation warrants or anyone expects)

THE WORLD IS SO UNFAIR!!!!!!!!!!!!

Beat.

CHARLOTTE

Well

the world is broken

Just like us

We're sinners.

ANNE

Are we always sinners?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

ANNE

What if we never leave the house?

CHARLOTTE

Still.

ANNE

But why?

CHARLOTTE

Because we're born that way.

EMILY

Is it bad if my heart is more attached to earth than the idea of heaven?

CHARLOTTE

(flatly)

Yes.

That's bad.

BRANWELL

You should suffer, Emily.

Then you won't be bad anymore.

That's what the Bible says.

CHARLOTTE

That's not what it means.

BRANWELL

That's exactly what it means.

ANNE

(sincerely)

How can we suffer so that we can be better?

BRANWELL

By hating yourself.

EMILY

By starving yourself.

BRANWELL

By making yourself sick.

EMILY

By getting sick and refusing help.

BRANWELL

By telling yourself you deserve it.

ANNE

I don't like this game.

Can we pretend that we're little again?

and everyone is alive

and we're cozy by the fire making up stories

and everything is nice?

Beat.

EMILY

Once upon a time

ANNE

There was a house

BRANWELL

And it burned down.

Emily laughs.

CHARLOTTE

But the family who lived inside the house

was at church the night of the fire

So they survived

ANNE

They were good people

Hardworking

CHARLOTTE

and soon they set out to build a new house.

ANNE

All the men in town wanted to help

because they had God in their hearts

CHARLOTTE

And eyes for the sisters in the family.

Anne and Charlotte giggle.

Branwell nudges Emily.

BRANWELL

Did you hear that, Emily?

Eyes for the sisters.

CHARLOTTE

You know

Our stories are just as good as the ones we read

There's money in writing

and if your work is popular enough you get invited to fancy parties and operas in London

ANNE

I like the stories about people who overcome great obstacles and fall in love

CHARLOTTE

The Best stories are rooted in what the author Knows

We know the moors and church and growing up without a mother

Orphans are very popular

ANNE

Maybe I'll write a love story someday

Once I've been in love

What do you think it feels like?

KIMBERLY

Like when you're chopping vegetables and the knife slips and cuts off a piece of your finger and it happens so fast you don't realize it at first and then there's blood on your hand and the table and only then do you feel the sting and the sting becomes really bad really intense pain and then the pain transcends itself and becomes a noble beautiful thing you wish you could wear like a cape.

Beat.

CHARLOTTE

Like a warm bath.

BRANWELL

Like misjudging the distance between the last stair and the ground.

ANNE

Like your favorite meal.

CHARLOTTE

Like dropping your plate on the floor during your favorite meal.

EMILY

Like the wind against the rocks.

The rock seems like it's the stronger thing.

But the wind wears the rock away

Until the rock is dust.

And the dust blows away in the wind.

And there is nothing.

And you never knew there was ever a rock at all.

Beat.

Church bells chime.

CHARLOTTE

Right.

Well.

No more putting it off.

Let's go.

*Charlotte lines her siblings up in a row and prepares them –
Straightening clothes, dusting shoulders, wiping smudges from faces.
Satisfied, she leads them on their way.*

THREE: SCARY KITTY

Lainey's bedroom.

A suburb of a suburb of a suburb.

She reads to Amber from a laptop.

LAINHEY

There has been a big misconception about my pal the Slender Man due to the appearance of this article.

He does not have hair or a face.

Everything else is correct.

There are also some questions as to how many of him exist

And the answer is one, unless he's playing tricks on me and if he is, then good job,
Slendy, you crafty beastie.
As of now, Slendy has three or four known proxies.
There are more in training.
I am in training.

AMBER
It's so scary!!

LAINY
Did you know he's ten feet tall?

AMBER
I heard
he was born in a swamp.

LAINY
I heard he was never born at all.

AMBER
I heard
He is how all of us were born.
I heard he takes baths in blood.

LAINY
I heard he hates blood and your blood dries up as soon as he looks you in the eye

AMBER
Do you think it makes him sad?
That everybody alive has blood inside of them and he doesn't?

LAINY
Yeah.
It probably does.
That's why he has to kill people.
He's lonely.
And he wants friends who don't have any more blood.
He wants friends who are like him.

AMBER
Where does he live?

LAINY
Everywhere.

All of it.
Yes.
He can change shape
like an octopus
and so he makes Everywhere his home
But only the worthy can live with him and see what he sees
An island
in the middle of an inky blood sea
with beaches of skin-colored sand

AMBER
Ahhhhhh!!

She snuggles into Lainey.

Meow.

LAINY
Meow meow kitty-cow.

AMBER
You're a good kitty.

LAINY
Purrrrrrrr.

AMBER
Good kitty.

LAINY
I heard you can move his face around like wax.
IF he ever lets you touch him.

AMBER
What do you have to do to touch him?

LAINY
Something really Big.
I dunno.
I'll put that on my list to research.

AMBER
Can you research what I have to do to touch Ronny?

LAINY
Uuuggghhhh

AMBER
My crush on him is getting like
Out of control.

LAINY
I hate it when you say you have a crush on someone with a smile on your face
like you're not talking about the most terrible feeling it is possible to have.
They call it a *crush* for a reason.
It's mean.
It hurts.

AMBER
Who do you have a crush on?

LAINY
Nobody.

AMBER
Come onnnnn.
Who's your crush?

LAINY
This -
The terminology doesn't even make sense.
You're asking two different questions.
"Who do you have a crush on" and like "I have a crush on you" is
You're crushing someone, like you're sitting on top of them and your weight is
crushing them into dust.
"Who's your crush" and "My crush" sounds like the person is crushing you.

AMBER
They all mean the same thing.
It all just means "who do you like."
God
you're so weird

LAINY
I'm not trying to be weird.

Beat.

LAINY

So I don't have a crush *on* anybody.

But my *crush* is

Luke Stapleton.

AMBER

Really??

LAINY

He crushes me.

He *crushes* me.

When he's in the same room as me, I don't know how to *be*.

It's like he's cutting into my air supply, because I get all lightheaded and weird, and if I don't know what he's doing at any given moment, I can't focus on whatever *I'm* doing.

And he doesn't care what I'm doing.

What I'm doing at any given moment is so beside the point to Luke Stapleton, it's not even *beside* the point, it's like, in a totally different galaxy than the point.

One time, though?

One time in English class?

We were in the same group for an in-class assignment and

He looked at me.

He looked at me at the same time I was looking at him.

And like his

Eyes

Are just –

They

Crackle

The way fires do.

His eyes are like campfires.

It makes me feel drunk.

It makes me feel wild

It makes me wanna reach out and grab onto him and sink in my claws until I see blood

I can hardly *look* at him –

He is my crush.

His very existence crushes me.

AMBER

...

Have you ever *been* drunk, though?

LAINY

No but

Sometimes I look at him and I'm like

I wish I could eat your eyeballs clean out of your sockets.

Do you know what I mean?

Beat.

AMBER

I have to pee.

LAINY

Okay.

Amber leaves and then comes back almost immediately

AMBER

Hey

Do you –

I started my period.

It wasn't supposed to happen until next week

and it hurts

and I don't have anything with me

Do you

Have stuff?

LAINY

...no.

but

I can make you a pad

That's what I always do.

AMBER

...you can MAKE me one?

LAINY

It's not weird.

AMBER

...it's a little weird.

Beat.

AMBER
Is it because
Is your family
Okay?
Like
Money-wise?
I know you/ said –

LAINY
Don't feel sorry for me.

AMBER
Okay.

Beat.
Lainey gathers supplies and begins layering and taping pieces of toilet paper to make a pad.
Amber watches her with a combination of revulsion, pity, and awe.

LAINY
Hey do you think vampires could live off of period blood?
Like wouldn't that solve a bunch of problems?
They wouldn't have to kill people or turn people or whatever, they could just drink out of whoever's bloody vag was around.

AMBER
I don't know.
It seems different.

LAINY
I mean it's blood.

AMBER
But it's like
Dead blood.
Right?
It's just our bodies getting rid of stuff it's not using.
Like stuff for babies.
Eggs.

LAINY
It's so cool we make eggs.

AMBER

So I don't think vampires could drink it.
They need like
Fresh blood.

LAINY

Bummer.
That could have been pretty revolutionary.

AMBER

Hey Lainey?
Did you make those cuts on your legs?

Beat.

It's just like
You said it was from briars but...

LAINY

They are from briars.

AMBER

I mean
I know how briar cuts look
And
They don't look like that.

Beat.

LAINY

I'm not like
Slitting my wrists or anything.
It's just my leg.
Legs are stupid.

AMBER

Lainey.
Why?

LAINY

You can't tell anybody.
I'll be so mad at you if you do.
I'll be worse than mad.
I'll be the worst thing you've ever seen.

AMBER

Yeah but I kind of feel like I have to and I'm worried about you and –

Lainey screams very loudly for longer than we think she's going to.

Amber is afraid.

AMBER

Lainey stop.

Lainey hisses at Amber.

LAINEY

No Lainey here.

AMBER

I'm not kidding Lainey you're really scaring me.

LAINEY

You can't tell anybody.

You have to promise.

AMBER

Okay.

I do.

I won't.

LAINEY

Prove it.

AMBER

I promise.

Lainey grabs Amber's hand.

LAINEY

Pinky-promise.

They hook pinkies.

LAINEY

Now whole-hand promise.

*They grasp hands.
A sad moment as they're holding hands.*

AMBER
Lainey, I don't want you to do that anymore.

LAINHEY
You don't understand.

AMBER
Lainey, please.

LAINHEY
You don't understand me you're nothing like me!!

*Lainey tries to break away from Amber.
Amber holds tight and doesn't let Lainey's hands go.*

AMBER
You're my best friend.

LAINHEY
You're not mine!

*Lainey struggles to get away.
She thrashes and pulls violently.
Amber is stronger than she looks, or maybe she has experience with this.
She holds her own, keeping Lainey close. She eventually pulls Lainey into an embrace.
Lainey starts crying and collapses into Amber.
Amber holds her and pets her hair.*

AMBER
Shhhhhhh.

Shh shhh shhhh.
It's okay, little kitty-cat.
It's okay.

LAINHEY
You *are* my best friend.

AMBER
I know, kitty.
I know.

LAINY
I'm sorry.

AMBER
I know.

*A moment more of hugging and petting.
Amber pulls back and checks Lainey's face.*

AMBER
Better?

LAINY
Meow.

AMBER
That was scary.
Don't be a scary kitty, okay?

LAINY
Meow.

AMBER
Meow.

FOUR: PAIN

KIMBERLY
I walked home alone the other night, barefoot, a mile across town.

I'm barefoot not because I'm free-spirited and spontaneous
I'm barefoot because I wore uncomfortable shoes
And they made my feet bleed.
If I was walking with someone, I wouldn't be barefoot.
I would wear the uncomfortable shoes until they filled with blood.
I have a very low tolerance for pain, but a very high tolerance for what I can withstand
before I show an ounce of vulnerability to anyone about the level of pain I'm in.

My mother says that even when I was young, I didn't crave attention when I hurt myself, not like most children. If I fell down, if I bled profusely, if I had tears and pain in my eyes, I jumped back up immediately to say, "I'M FINE!"

What is that, inside of me?
What makes a three-year-old turn away comfort from her mother?

FIVE: HOT AIR BALLOON.

*The moors.
Two months after the funeral.
Charlotte, Emily, Branwell, and Anne stand and look up at the sky – facing the audience.
They're waiting for something.*

CHARLOTTE
Once upon a time

BRANWELL
The end.

CHARLOTTE
We have to practice if we want to get better
Once upon a time

ANNE
Is that it?!

Beat

BRANWELL
I think that's a bird.

EMILY
(testing out the words)
A hot air balloon...

ANNE
This is so exciting!!

CHARLOTTE
You'd think they could come up with a more beautiful name for such a beautiful invention.

EMILY
Something about the sky.

ANNE
Something blue.

BRANWELL
Mrs. Robbins's eyes are blue.

CHARLOTTE
Please
do not talk
about your employer's
wife
that way in public.
This is a Good Job.
Do not Ruin it.

BRANWELL
I'm stating facts.
Her eyes are blue.
And she's right over there, I –
I should go say hello.
It's the spring festival, and
she's my employer's wife, as you said
It's only proper
and I know how important being proper is to you.

Branwell leaves.
Charlotte stews.

CHARLOTTE
He's so –
I just –
IT'S NOT THAT HARD TO DO WHAT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO DO YOU JUST DO IT
YOU –
No.
I don't want to get upset here.

EMILY
The sky is other colors besides blue.
It's grey.
Sometimes it's purple and pink.
Green
before a storm
Black

*The balloon appears.
They all visibly react.*

CHARLOTTE
Oh my
Would you look at that.

Anne shrieks a little shriek.

ANNE
It's on fire!!

EMILY
It uses fire to fly.
I read about it.

ANNE
Where does it land?

CHARLOTTE
It depends on the wind.

They look.

EMILY
It looks like something from another world.

ANNE
Like something from a fairy tale!

CHARLOTTE
Once upon a time

ANNE
A hot air balloon descended from heaven!

CHARLOTTE
And when it landed
A man got out.

ANNE
A handsome man.

CHARLOTTE

A handsome king in need of a queen.

EMILY

Or was he a man? Or was he a ghost or was he a shadow or was he a nightmare?

All of it.

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

He was a man.

ANNE

And as soon as he left the balloon and his feet touched the ground

EMILY

The grass died.

The flowers died.

CHARLOTTE

Emily

This is not that kind of story.

EMILY

I don't like your kinds of stories.

They're boring.

Beat.

ANNE

I want the king to be kind

and gentle

and to know the names of trees

CHARLOTTE

The king is steady

and focused

and knows what books are the best ones to read

EMILY

The nightmare shadow is three miles tall

and faceless

and hairless

and speechless

and mean.

and after he killed everything, he got back into the balloon to fly away –

CHARLOTTE

No

The balloon is in our story.

You have lost your balloon privileges.

We're going home.

Slender Man enters, holding a bouquet of balloons like flowers.

He is dark and mysterious.

We can't quite see his face, but we can tell he's charming.

He moves like a wink.

EMILY

Then he'll turn into a balloon.

He can change shape into anything

He'll grow balloons from his arms

He'll float away back home and take me with him.

To Gondal.

Slender Man hands Emily a balloon.

SIX: SKATELAND.

Lainey and Amber enter.

They "fly" across the stage with sweater wings (holding the bottom of a sweater over your head from the back like wings).

They fly into Skateland, and the stage transforms – cheap, colorful lights flood the stage.

Pop music plays.

It's a birthday party.

The two girls are in sock-feet – off the skate floor, in the refreshment area.

Kimberly refills a bowl with chips.

There's a piñata of some male cartoon character on a bench, waiting to be hung.

LAINY

SSSSWWWWEEEEEEAAAAATTTTTTEEEEERRRRR

WWWIIIIIIIIINNNNNNNNGGGGGSSSSSSSSSS

AMBER

MEOW MEOW MEOW MEOW

LAINY
POW POW POW POW
FLYING KITTY ASSASSINS TAKING OVER THE WORLD

AMBER
(sharp shift in focus and tone, looking at someone in the distance)
Ew.
Constance is here

LAINY
Yeah
Sophie's like
her best friend

AMBER
I thought they were in a fight

LAINY
They probably are
but fights get paused on birthdays

AMBER
She's not even that pretty
she just has boobs
Everybody is so blind

LAINY
What if they *were* blind?
Like
What if I took my earring and gouged out their stupid idiot eyeballs?

AMBER
You're not supposed to take your earrings out, you just got them pierced last week.
You're supposed to wait like, five weeks or something like that.

LAINY
(annoyed)
Yeah.
I know.
That's not even the point, sometimes you're just so –
Sometimes you are the opposite of everything I've ever liked.

Beat.

AMBER

And sometimes you're really really mean.

LAINY

You don't have to stay with me, you know
You can go be with your other friends

AMBER

I don't want you to be alone

LAINY

I love being alone
He loves being alone
Just like an octopus

AMBER

Why are you like
obsessed
with oc-to-pi?

LAINY

It's octopuses, not octopi
and they're really really cool
you would like them if you knew more about them which is why I'm trying to tell you
more about them

AMBER

I just
You need to get better at talking about normal things.
Isn't that what Mr. Randall said?

LAINY

Kind of

AMBER

Well that's what I say
Not just octopuses and Slender Man all the time
Especially not here

LAINY

Then where?

AMBER
...Lainey oh my god look

LAINY
(weird robot voice)
No Lainey here.
Oo-bee-dee-bop
Kyakyakya.

AMBER
Lainey for real.
He's *Looking*.
Luke Stapleton is *Looking Over Here*.

LAINY
(dropping the weird robot voice)
I don't believe you.

AMBER
Look for yourself.

LAINY
I can't.
Then he'll see me looking.

AMBER
(Duh, that's the point)
Yeah.

LAINY
That's embarrassing!!!

AMBER
You want him to see you seeing him.
I promise.
That's how it All Starts.

LAINY
What starts?

AMBER
(reverently)
Everything.
First

you look at him.
Then
He Looks Back.
It's the Best.

*Lainey very quickly glances over in Luke's direction.
Luke skates across the stage – a perfect beam of light shines on his perfect face.*

LAINERY
Oh my god.
Oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god.

AMBER
Okay, now look back and smile.

LAINERY
I can't.

AMBER
Do it!!

Lainey summons every ounce of her courage to look at Luke.

*She tries to smile, but she gets nervous and makes a face that's like a cat hissing without sound.
Oh no. It's so weird.
She realizes how weird it is and tries to wave, but even her arm motion is weird?*

AMBER
What
Are you
Doing.

LAINERY
Oh no I'm sorry oh no I didn't mean to I tried to smile but my face didn't do it

AMBER
It's okay!!
I bet he thought it was just like
a game or something
Here –

Amber grabs a nearby pair of roller skates.

AMBER
Let's go skate again!

LAINY
No thank you.

AMBER
Come onnnnnnn.
It'll be fun!

*The music transforms into a slow song –
"All My Life," by K-Ci and JoJo.
The lights change into something "romantic" – maybe there are neon hearts.
To these two, it is the height of sophistication and romance.*

AMBER
Oh my god
Omigod COUPLE SKATE omigod.

*She looks around. She tries to act casual.
Lainey eats M&Ms and thinks about when this will be over.*

*Luke Stapleton skates back into view, and keeps skating directly over to Lainey and Amber.
He's so smooth and so cool.
God, it hurts.*

LUKE
(to Amber)
Hey.

Amber glances at Lainey.

AMBER
Hey, Luke.

LUKE
I like your skates.

AMBER
Thanks.
We brought our own.
Lainey's mom has like
A bunch of skates for some reason.
In their garage.

*This was Amber's attempt at including Lainey in the conversation.
Lainey doesn't know how to join in.
Luke finally notices she's there, though, and gives her a chin-nod.*

LUKE
That's weird.
But cool.

AMBER
Yeah.

LAINERY
Yeah my mom's kind of like a hoarder but kind of not – it's not like it is on tv – like it's pretty functional hoarding for the most part it doesn't really like get in the way of our lives or anything – I don't know if you ever watch "Hoarders" – I don't watch it like every day – I'm making it seem like I watch it more than I do – but it's a show about people who keep a lot of things – people who hoard – I guess that's implied in the title, but I also think that so many things are like puns on other things that it's hard to tell what's literal and what's not but yeah anyway "Hoarders" is a literal title it's about hoarders and I really like all of them I really like all of the hoarders I feel like they would be my friends.

Beat.

LUKE
...
Yeah.
Totally.
...
So
Uh
Sorry to like
Cut the conversation short
But the song's gonna end eventually and it's a really good one so
Amber?
Do you wanna like
Skate with me?

AMBER
Oh!

Beat.
Lainey begins to pick intently at her nails.

That sounds really fun
But
I was maybe gonna skate with Lainey.

LAINY
Don't be stupid that would be stupid if we skated together I don't even have my skates
on and you do have your skates on so you should skate.

LUKE
Yeah.
You should skate.

LAINY
(chanting)
Skate, skate, skate, skate!

Luke joins in.

LUKE and LAINY
Skate, skate, skate, skate, skate, skate, skate, skate!

*Luke laughs.
Time stops.*

*Lainey loves this laugh. She has listened to it and catalogued its cadences for months.
And now it's coming from something she did. That they did together.
She is torn between cherishing the moment and wanting to burn it all down.*

*Amber looks at Lainey.
She tries to read her, but Lainey's gotten good at turning her face into stone.*

AMBER
Okay, let's skate
There's only like
Half the song left, anyway

LAINY
Yay have fun bye!!!!

*Luke takes Amber's hand and leads her away.
Lainey watches them for a long moment.
Her face crumples like she's going to cry, but she really really doesn't want to cry.*

*So she picks at her nails.
She picks a little too hard.
She rips off a hangnail – it hurts.
Good.
She winces in pain, but then she starts to pick again. Harder.*

*K-Ci and JoJo continue to underscore the trauma.
After long moment of this, the music fades and Kimberly speaks.*

KIMBERLY

I think of my heart as a physical place, which of course it is a physical *thing*, but what I mean is that it seems to me a landscape, a city.

There are natural disasters that hit and change places forever.
No matter the rebuilding or the rebranding – people will always point and say
That's where it hit.
I was there.
It was so close to me.

and some parts of the damage will be recognizable, yes, but other elements are so subtle, so plenty, you could never point and name them all.
They become a part of the city, just as much a part as a bench, a sidewalk, a tree.
Hearts are the same way.

I remember sitting in my car with him outside a party, where he prophesized it all.
We had never even kissed when he complimented my “tits” and said he would see them someday, lick them someday, he even mimed it with his hands and tongue, and it didn’t occur to me to be horrified that he was doing this so suddenly and crudely. I wanted him to do those things.
I wanted it with a desperation that was foreign to me at that point of my life.
I didn’t tell him that, not then.
I drove him home. I didn’t go inside.

It was nearly a year later, after everything, when I sank to the floor, stumbling drunk, and sobbed at his feet in front of an entire party. He laughed in my face. He had the same reaction when I told him I loved him, but it wasn’t funny either time. I meant it. I meant every word. I always do.

What he didn’t prophesize in the car that night was how he would hurt me, though he must have known.

Hurt isn’t even the word, it doesn’t contain the scope or consequence of how the entire landscape of my heart changed after he broke it, how I didn’t recognize the sights inside of my own self after him, not for years.

I was going to say that he was a hurricane, but that's not right.
That's not what it was. He wasn't a tornado, either; tornadoes come and then go, but he
stayed and stayed and stayed.

He was a flood.
Floods seep in, slowly.
Floods are invasive.

It's years before the landscape of my heart is recognizable as what it once was, and even
then, there are changes that linger.
It's a process. It's a very long process.

"I hope we never run out of things to talk about," I said, and he said we wouldn't, and
I feel silly now, for saying that and believing him.

Nothing grows after a flood.
The ground is too wet
Too heavy
Too much.

I've been told I'm "too much" too often for it to be untrue.

*The music comes back on – still K-Ci and JoJo.
After a moment, Vanessa enters on roller skates, slowly.
She wobbles a lot and seems like she might fall down any second.
She makes it over to the bench where Lainey sits.*

VANESSA
Hey.

LAINY
Hey.

Beat.

LAINY
Who are you?

VANESSA
Vanessa.

LAINY
I've never seen you before.

VANESSA

Yeah.

Same.

Is your hand is bleeding?

LAINY

Yeah

I ripped off some of my skin.

VANESSA

Metal.

LAINY

Are you like

Some stalker who came to puke on Sophie's cake or something?

VANESSA

That'd be a stupid thing for a stalker to do.

LAINY

You seem to know an awful lot about stalkers.

Vanessa picks up the piñata that's been on the bench next to them.

VANESSA

This guy

This guy right here is like

The Ultimate stalker.

Lainey laughs.

VANESSA

I'm being serious!!

I'm being so so serious.

Look at his face.

Look at his creepy weird magic face.

Lainey looks.

She sees.

LAINY

It is kinda magic.

And creepy.

And weird.

VANESSA

His name is...

LAINY

We Dare Not Speak His Name.

VANESSA

Like Voldemort!!

LAINY

YES!!!

I LOVE VOLDEMORT!!!!

VANESSA

Ohmygod amazing we're soulmates

LAINY

(back to the game)

He comes at night

He lives in dreams

VANESSA

He lives behind eyelids

LAINY

He loves eyelids

He eats eyelid skin roasted for a snack

Having eyelids is a luxury

You have to earn your eyelids

What have you done to earn your eyelids lately?

VANESSA

I'm sorry I'll do better I promise

He might punish you.

But you deserve it.

LAINY

He's always always there.

He's always always watching.

And some people might think that's scary

But we know that's the best part.

VANESSA

He's magic and he lets us borrow his magic.

LAINY

He's weird and he lets us be weird without rolling his eyes or telling us to stop.

VANESSA

He lives in a magical kingdom

LAINY

Made of bones

VANESSA

Yes

LAINY

He gives us presents.

VANESSA

He is the presents.

LAINY

The presents come from inside of him.

Lainey picks up the piñata, examines it closely.

She sets it down on the bench between her and Vanessa.

She picks up her roller skates.

She hands one to Vanessa and keeps one for herself.

Lainey bludgeons the piñata – hesitantly at first, but then it builds into a joyful brutality.

After several moments of Lainey beating the piñata alone, Vanessa joins in.

Success – the piñata bursts open.

This moment should feel to us how it feels to the girls – magical, powerful.

The girls take fistfuls of candy and eat as though they've been starved for weeks.

This should take a while and feel kind of brutal too.

They toss the wrappers in the air – a sticky confetti shower.

Balloons of all shapes, sizes, and colors flood the stage.

Some of them pop.

Some of them rise.

Some of them might look like they're dancing.

A balloon-ballet.

*Vanessa continues to eat candy, oblivious.
Skateland and all its inhabitants fall away, except for Lainey.
She watches the balloon ballet, rapt, for a long moment.*

*The balloons falling turn into rain.
The music turns into thunder.
Skateland becomes a wide, open field.
A single tree in the distance.
A storm rages.
The tree's branches dance in the storm.
Lightning strikes in bright colors – the same colors as the balloons.
Wind.*

*Slender Man appears.
Did he come from the tree?
Was the tree always him?
Is he magically revealed during a lightning strike?
All of it.
Yes.*

*He approaches Lainey.
He holds out his hand.
She reaches out to take it, but –*

*From far away, voices and music float back in.
Closer.
Amber's voice calling to Lainey.*

*Then Amber enters on her skates.
She skates right into Lainey, not seeing Slender Man.*

AMBER
Kitty, I was calling for you!

*Lainey stares at Amber, not really seeing her.
Slender Man stands behind Lainey.*

AMBER
Lainey.
Hi.
Earth to Lainey.

A balloon pops.

SEVEN: STORM

*The Brontë home, after supper.
Two-three months after the hot air balloon.
Emily and Branwell sit at the kitchen table.
There's a torrential thunderstorm raging outside.
A clock ticks.
Emily is hunched over, writing something in a tiny book.
Her unfinished dinner is on the table.
Branwell is drinking brandy.
After a moment, Emily turns to Branwell.*

EMILY

Hey.

BRANWELL

Yes?

Emily reaches inside of her pockets or dress or hair or shoes or all of the above and pulls out several tiny books.

EMILY

I'm keeping secrets.

Charlotte told me to stop going to Gondal but it just keeps growing.
She has no idea.

*Emily checks over her shoulder to make sure Charlotte and Anne aren't coming.
She reads.*

“the screams of the wind
and the screams of the wounded
make a music only He can hear
 of bones
 of memory
 of dust of ice of pus of mold
He fills the sea with inky red blood from the wounds of His victims
He coats the beaches in skin-colored sand
and builds cliffs made of bones
given freely from the worthy”

that's all of this one so far

BRANWELL
Who is He?

EMILY
They're coming

She puts the books away.

*Anne and Charlotte enter.
They walk in circles around the table.*

CHARLOTTE
Isn't this nice!
I think we should walk inside every day.
Not just when it storms.

EMILY
No thank you.
Walking outside against the wind feels like an accomplishment

CHARLOTTE
Not *instead* of outside.
In addition to.
So it's
Morning prayers
Breakfast
Lessons
Walk outside and use the outside to inform and reflect upon our lessons.
Lunch
Prayers
Reading and writing and drawing
Tea
Walk outside and flexible free time
Supper
 Emily
 you still need to finish eating
Reading and writing and drawing IF you eat your supper
Walk inside
Prayers
Bed.

ANNE
I like it in here!
Sometimes the wind outside chaps my cheeks.

Branwell pours himself another drink.

CHARLOTTE

I think one brandy is plenty
don't you, brother?

BRANWELL

I'd rather have seven
but thank you so much for your opinion, sister.

CHARLOTTE

Brandy is also
Expensive.

BRANWELL

Well I got a rather generous severance package
so I can afford to splurge.

Charlotte comes to a sudden stop.

CHARLOTTE

Severance?

BRANWELL

(cheerfully)

It's over!

It's all over!

We –

Mr. Robbins fired me!

She –

I tried to set their carriage on fire
but it started raining!

He laughs a horrible, pained laugh.

Charlotte remains stunned into stillness.

Anne is so so nervous.

Emily stares at Branwell like she's never seen him before.

Anyway.

Goodnight!

Branwell leaves.

He takes the bottle of brandy with him.

Charlotte stares after him.
Beat.

ANNE
Was he –
With Mrs. Robbins?

Charlotte takes several deep breaths.

What are we going to do?

CHARLOTTE
Not now, Anne!

A moment.
Charlotte gathers herself.

EMILY
I don't like it when the potatoes are all the same size
Father says it doesn't matter
But it matters

CHARLOTTE
Emily, for GOD'S SAKE
Will you at least PAY ATTENTION
when our LIVES ARE FALLING APART??

Emily stares.

EIGHT: WILD

KIMBERLY
I never met my grandmother, but I feel closer to her than anyone else in my family.
I don't know many things about her, but
I know she loved to read and tell stories
I know she married late, which was unheard of for the time
I know that nobody knew how to help her when she got the way she got
and so they sent her away.
I know that when she came back, she was different.
she didn't like stories anymore then.
She got married late
And I don't know why
Maybe she was scared and alone and lonely

And she didn't realize that being scared and alone and lonely is hard
But it minimizes the casualties.

Being alone is a strategy.
Being alone is productive.

I am Just Like Her.
That's what Everyone says.
She might not have known about the ticking bomb inside herself until it was too late
But I know what's inside of me

It is wild.
It is scary.
It is the stuff nightmares are made of I could hurt you I could hurt me I could burn
everything down and find joy in the burning and I would dance in the flames.

NINE: PREPARATION.

Two months after Skateland.
Lainey's bedroom.
Lainey and Vanessa pack for a camping trip.
Lainey is curled up at Vanessa's feet, nuzzling her like a cat.

LAINHEY
Meow.

VANESSA
Shhhh, kitty.

LAINHEY
Meowww.

VANESSA
Good kitty.

LAINHEY
Meowww.

VANESSA
Pretty kitty.

Lainey makes biscuits on Vanessa's leg.

VANESSA
Kitty
Stop.
That's annoying.

*Lainey scratches Vanessa.
Hard.*

VANESSA
OW!
LAINEY!
What the fuck?

*Lainey leans back and stares at Vanessa.
Smiles.*

LAINEY
Meow.

Beat.

VANESSA
O-kaaaaay
What else do we need to bring?

LAINEY
Food

VANESSA
I have like three whole boxes of moon ice cream.
My aunt took me to the space museum and she always feels sad around me because she never had any kids of her own and now since I'm like almost grown up it's just this reminder of all the things she never did and so she buys me all kinds of weird things
Like moon ice cream.

LAINEY
Pepper spray.
Just in case.

VANESSA
Flashlights.

LAINEY
The will to live.

VANESSA
Your asthma inhaler.

LAINY
Yeah, I know.

VANESSA
I'm just saying.
That was so scary last week
I was worried about you

LAINY
You sound like Amber.

VANESSA
Ew.
How dare you.

LAINY
Okay she's not all "ew"

VANESSA
All I know is that she's your "best friend" but she's never around and whenever you're sad and weird it's usually because of her and Luke

LAINY
I'm just sad and weird
Period
That's like
who I am

VANESSA
Poor Little Lainy

LAINY
Shut up!!
Batteries
for the flashlight
Weapons

VANESSA
I brought my mom's knife

Like for bears or whatever

She produces a kitchen knife with a cover – she slides it out and admires it.

LAINY

Cool

VANESSA

Yeah I just like to steal random shit from her sometimes

She never notices

Amber runs in.

AMBER

Sorry sorry sorry sorry

I'm here!

Camping trip!

Yay!!

LAINY

We were just going over the list of supplies

VANESSA

(still holding the knife)

Did you bring any weapons?

LAINY

We should wear bright colors in the woods.

It's deer season.

We don't want to get shot.

Vanessa packs the knife.

AMBER

Where are we going?

LAINY

It's this spot I found when I was like six

and I ran away for two days

there's this weird old chimney

in a clearing in the middle of the woods

AMBER

Whoa /

Creepy.

VANESSA

Cool

AMBER

Um

So Lainey I texted you earlier and you never responded

VANESSA

We left our phones at my house

We're off the grid

AMBER

Oh

Well -

Luke enters.

LUKE

Hey dudes

He snakes his arm around Amber's waist, pulling her close.

Sorry

I couldn't find parking.

Beat.

LAINY

(way too loudly)

HEY LUKE

uh

sorry that was

hi

LUKE

Hi Lainey!

He gives her a high-five.

LAINY

So this is my room

you're in my room

AMBER
Hey Luke
Can you
I left my chapstick in your car

LUKE
Ha!
Yeah you'll definitely need that, huh?

He wiggles his eyebrows suggestively and winks, kissing her on the cheek several times in quick succession before bounding out in that way teenage boys do, that way that makes the pit of your stomach ache with longing.

Amber giggles and then looks at Lainey and wipes her face clean of pleasure.

Beat.

LAINY
I didn't know he could drive

AMBER
Yeah
He just got his license last week.

Beat.

AMBER
That's what my text was / about, I –

LAINY
Yeah no I figured

AMBER
I just thought like
You said you were cool with him and me?

LAINY
I am!!

AMBER
and I mean
it's been a couple months now...
I want my best friend to get to know my

boyfriend
you know?

LAINY
I want that too!
It's great that he's here!
I love that he's here!

Beat.
A huge crack of thunder.

AMBER
Oh my god

VANESSA
It's gonna pass

AMBER
Maybe we should just go to the movies or something instead

LAINY
Don't be such a chicken, Amber.

Lainey takes her backpack and leaves.
Vanessa gives Amber a Look and follows.
After a moment, Amber also follows, nervously.

Branwell stumbles onstage as they run out.
He's Very drunk.
Emily blocks his path.

EMILY
I thought you were stronger than this

BRANWELL
Nope
sorry

EMILY
I thought you were like me
But you're weak
You're a coward

BRANWELL

Yes

correct

A moment.

Then

Emily helps him walk home.

TEN: FAR FROM FEAR.

KIMBERLY

Snakes are the only things that scare my brother
and I've always envied that specificity.

My father killed a rattlesnake in front of us when we were very small
On a dirt road in South Georgia.
We were in the truck, my brother and I, and our father was outside on the road.
And there was a rattlesnake.
And it struck at our father.
And we watched, helpless and small, separated by glass, about to watch our father die.
But he didn't die.

Our father looked the rattlesnake in the eye
He reached in the back of the truck
He grabbed a metal shovel
He brought it down with a righteous fury
and he cut off the rattlesnake's head.

My brother says that's why he's afraid of snakes. Because of that day.
That memory got into his very bones and grew as he grew.
It makes more sense to be afraid of something that has an origin like that.
Doesn't it make more sense?

Rather something with real roots and reason
Than far-away fears that can never touch you.

I can't quite articulate what I learned that day
But it was something far from fear.
It was something along the lines of:
*You take the metal shovel from the back of the truck and you do whatever you need to do with it
and you do it quickly and you use force and you do not flinch and you do not cry and you get
behind the wheel and you drive away.*

ELEVEN: ALMOST THERE.

*Lainey, Amber, Vanessa, and Luke.
Camping.*

Kimberly, at her chimney in the woods.

*The Brontë home.
Branwell is passed out at the table.
Anne and Emily stand above him.*

*Charlotte enters with an armload of paper.
She dumps it on the table.*

CHARLOTTE

Here's what we're going to do.
We're going to take inventory of everything we've ever written.
We're going to come up with different names for ourselves –
Boys names
And we're going to sell them.
And that's the way we make money.
That's the way we get past this.

Now.
This is everything from upstairs.
Let's separate them into piles:
things we're proud of
things we hate
and
things with potential

*They begin separating the papers.
Anne puts all of hers in the "potential" pile.
Emily doesn't participate.*

*The campsite – it's not a good vibe.
Conversation has Not been flowing.*

VANESSA
I'm bored.

AMBER
I haven't heard you come up with any brilliant ideas of what to do.

LUKE

We could like tell scary stories or something

LAINY

Yeah!

AMBER

(with a sideways look to Lainey)

No I don't want to do that

VANESSA

I mean

Isn't that what you're supposed to do when you go camping?

LAINY

It's like

the law

LUKE

Oh I know one!! I know one that really happened!

My cousin

He was like

Camping

Just like we are

In the woods

and he ran into this creepy guy near the campsite and the guy like kept telling my

cousin all this stuff about "Hidden Treasure" in the woods

and then

fuck

I forget what happens then

but basically

like three months later my cousin was watching the news and it turns out that creepy

guy was a serial killer and they caught him and the treasure he was talking about was

Bones

Beat.

VANESSA

That's awesome.

LAINY

What kinds of bones?

LUKE
I dunno

AMBER
Your poor cousin!

LUKE
Oh it wasn't really my cousin
I made that part up so you'd be more scared

AMBER
Asshole

LAINY
It reminds me of this dream I keep having
It's like
So I'm in my room
and my room is still my room and I'm still me
But I can see through the walls
and where wooden beams should be
it's just hundreds of bones
and the insulation in the walls is people
and they're split open so the warmth of their guts
can keep us warm
and some of the people were still alive
and I could see them screaming but I couldn't hear them
and

AMBER
Okay
that's enough.

KIMBERLY
Where does my soul go?
Where can I be wild?
Can I take you with me when I'm wild?
Why can't I take you with me?
Is it possible to be wild and still be with you?
Can I be wild without being lonely?
Can you build a house and a life on the land of my heart, overgrown as it may be with
forest?
Where does where can can I why is can I can you
Where is it safe?

CHARLOTTE

This is my favorite.

It describes a beautiful lady's face in great detail.

I find that the best stories are the ones with detail about beautiful people.

Emily puts a single piece of paper in the "hate" pile.

CHARLOTTE

Emily?

Is that all you have?

Emily says nothing.

CHARLOTTE

I know I've seen you writing more than a single page.

We had reading and writing time for a whole hour just yesterday.

Emily says nothing.

CHARLOTTE

Emily.

ANNE

(an aside to Charlotte)

She didn't finish her supper.

CHARLOTTE

Emily

Is that true?

EMILY

You can't make me

CHARLOTTE

You've hardly eaten all day

You can eat just a little bit

EMILY

I'm almost there

CHARLOTTE

Almost where?

EMILY
He's almost here

CHARLOTTE
(reaching out and touching her)
Emily.

EMILY
I don't want it you can't make me want it I won't do it YOU CAN'T MAKE ME DO IT

VANESSA
Hey
You know what's fun?
Screaming

Vanessa screams.
Then she laughs.

LUKE
You know those screaming goats?
Those are awesome.

Luke screams.

Amber screams, if you can call it that.
It's little and cute.
Luke laughs.

LUKE
You're so fucking CUTE

Amber giggles.
Amber and Luke kiss.

Lainey screams.
It's weird and feral and scary.
Kimberly screams with her.
Vanessa laughs.

LUKE
What the fuck
you guys are so fucking weird.

CHARLOTTE

I know this is a trying time.

But we must keep up our strength.

Anne and I are going to make you a snack, and then you'll feel better.

All right?

Does that sound good?

Emily?

EMILY

Who's Emily?

Charlotte and Anne stand, unsettled for a moment, then they leave.

EMILY

I'm almost there.

Slender Man approaches.

He extends his hand to Emily.

Whatever sound normally accompanies Slender Man should transform into the string intro to K-Ci and JoJo's "All My Life."

No lyrics. Just music.

Slender Man and Emily dance.

It is achingly lovely and tender

Like at any moment they might fly away or kiss.

It is also ominous and unnerving

Like at any moment he might rip off Emily's head.

Kimberly watches.

The dance ends.

Emily gets out a tiny book and writes furiously beside passed-out Branwell.

KIMBERLY

My parents are selling the house

My parents are selling the woods

My parents are selling the wilderness

and the chimney in the middle of the trees

A fire burns inside a chimney and keeps a family warm

A fire burns outside a chimney and destroys everything in sight

A house and a forest burn and a chimney's the only thing left standing

Here's how you get there.

You go

Up the hill to the right of the house
Down past my shortcomings –
Through my regrets –
Onto the ever-growing trail of my anger
Follow it straight and look carefully through my past for the sun hitting the stones
and then here you are.
Here it is.

Do you see?

Here it is for the very last time.

I always imagined taking someone here, someone who mattered, someone who
Understood.
But it turns out no one ever did.
It's just me
and the things I make

It's crowded inside me.

*Everyone surrounds Kimberly.
They watch her carefully.*

I wrote this play.
Did you know that?
This play you're watching.
If you looked at your program
or if you did research before you bought a ticket
you'll see that this play is called Gondal
and it's written by Kimberly Belflower.

That's me.

I spend a lot of time writing things
and a lot of time *not* writing things
Sometimes it's procrastination.
and sometimes it's self-preservation.

Sometimes I scare me
and I get mad at myself for being scared
and I get mad at myself for being lonely
and I get mad at myself for crying

Where can I be wild?

Where is it safe?

I always imagined taking someone here
and now it's too late
I always

*At this point, everyone is gone besides Emily, Lainey, and Kimberly.
This happens smoothly, sneakily.*

EMILY
We're here

LAINY
We're someone

KIMBERLY
You are
But you aren't
You're inside me

LAINY
What else is inside you besides you?

EMILY
There's a whole world inside me
it's called Gondal
there's a sea of blood

LAINY
I made up a sea of blood too!!
and cliffs made out of / bones

EMILY
Bones

KIMBERLY
Yes!

EMILY
It's
where He lives

LAINY
It's where I live

EMILY
You can only find it if he lets you

LAINY
You can only see it if you suffer

EMILY
What do you do to suffer?

LAINY
I hurt myself

KIMBERLY
I hate myself

EMILY
I starve myself

LAINY
I make myself sick

KIMBERLY
I tell myself I deserve it

LAINY
Here's how you get there

EMILY
You have to be alone

LAINY
Sometimes I don't sleep for as many nights as I can stand it
and it's like I become somebody else and real isn't real anymore

EMILY
Sometimes I don't eat for as many days as I can stand it
because when my head gets black and fuzzy it finally gets empty enough for something
else to get in

KIMBERLY
Sometimes I forget old things to make space for new things
Sometimes that feels like the only way to keep moving

I almost forgot his middle name one time last year, and it was almost a relief.
But then I remembered.

LAINY
Whose middle name?

KIMBERLY
It doesn't matter
It shouldn't matter

LAINY
You're afraid of forgetting

EMILY
You're a coward

KIMBERLY
I'm afraid of you!!!
Becoming you
Not becoming you

EMILY
I'm not afraid of anything
My brother's afraid of snakes

KIMBERLY
Mine too!

LAINY
Snakes are like tentacles but alone

A shift, a realization.

EMILY
Octopuses live alone.

LAINY
Octopuses have been known to let themselves be caught, only to use the net as a trampoline and run.

EMILY
Octopuses kept in captivity have been known to escape and find their way back to the ocean.

KIMBERLY

You need to go back now.
I understand what happens next.

EMILY

No.

LAINY

I don't want to.

KIMBERLY

(scary)

You need to go back now I need you to go back now go now go now go go go go go
GO

The sound of rushing water.

Wind.

Lainey and Emily leave.

You take the metal shovel
you do whatever you need to do
you get behind the wheel
you

Kimberly turns to Slender Man.

She walks toward him.

He walks toward her.

They circle around each other once.

Slender Man reaches out his hand.

Kimberly takes it.

Something shifts.

She pulls him down, to her height.

She looks him in the eye.

She takes his face in her hands.

Slender Man freezes.

Kimberly steps back and walks around him as he's frozen.

She scales some kind of height until she's considerably taller than him.

She extends her arms and manipulates Slender Man's movements.

She makes him leave.

She is Slender Man now.

Maybe she was all along.

She is so fucking powerful.

She thinks about what she wants to happen next.

*K-Ci and Jojo's "All My Life" plays.
It's gloriously, dementedly loud.
Louder than you think it should be.*

*The Brontës roller skate across the moors.
They're free.*

*Luke and Lainey slow dance.
The Brontës circle around them.*

*The Brontës skate away.
The music cuts out completely.
Luke and Lainey keep dancing in silence for an uncomfortably long moment.*

LAINNEY
You have good shoulder bones.
They're just like
Really sharp
Which is my favorite kind.
I don't understand cannibalism 'cause I don't wanna eat flesh
But I do understand wanting to like
Get down to the bone.
I just mean that bones are pretty.
Blood is pretty too but we see blood more often so bones are kinda special.

*Lainey holds up Luke's arm.
She bites it.
She draws blood.*

Amber walks over.

AMBER
Lainey.
Lipstick goes on your lips.
How many times do we have to practice?

LAINNEY
Sorry.

Amber wipes the blood from Lainey's mouth.

AMBER
We're girls.

We have to make ourselves fit.
Here are the ways a lady can fit:
Wear the right thing
Say as little as possible
Laugh at his jokes
Even when they're not funny
Have an artistic skill like piano-playing
 but don't be better at piano than he is at guitar because he has a band and it's
 really important to him and he looks really cute when he plays

LAINY

What about the ways a boy can fit?

*Luke begins to do various exercises.
Amber admires him.
Emily enters and begins to do various exercises too.*

*Amber goes over to Luke, and Emily leaves.
Amber and Luke kiss.
They start making out and should continue throughout this scene.*

LAINY

What do you think stabbing feels like?

VANESSA

Like chopping a tomato.

LAINY

No
Like dirt
Like clay
Like the bottom of a pond

EMILY

Like being barefoot outside in a thunderstorm

LAINY

Like you have kitty-claws

VANESSA

Sometimes I get so sad thinking about kitties who get their claws taken away

LAINY

They're *supposed* to have claws.

It's evolution.

VANESSA

I bet stabbing feels a little scary.

KIMBERLY

I bet it feels like a relief.

Amber pulls away from Luke.

AMBER

I think you should go

LUKE

Did I do something?

AMBER

No it's just

I think it was a mistake

to invite you

Because of Lainey

LUKE

I have been so sweet to Lainey ever since you and me started / going out

AMBER

I just need to like

be here for her right now

she's going through something

and she's not gonna talk to me about it while you're here

KIMBERLY

That's a weird expression

"going through something"

like

where is she gonna be on the other side of that something?

Beat.

LUKE

Fine.

He leaves.

Charlotte enters, clutching a pillow.
She screams into it.
Beat.

CHARLOTTE

I used to cry when I was sad
but I don't anymore
Do you cry?

VANESSA

Ew.
No.
Not since I was like
Twelve.

CHARLOTTE

I got tired of people not taking me seriously
A lot of people assume you don't know how to do anything if you have feelings

VANESSA

I got tired of people telling me I was too sensitive
Like
one summer I went to art camp?
because my middle school art teacher thought I had Potential?
and I made this like
painting of my Heart
and it was mostly this one color I mixed myself
from pink and blue
I mixed it so perfectly and it made this kind of lilac
and I felt like
I Was that lilac?
and I explained it to my group
and they like looked at each other from the corners of their eyes
the way you do when you're like
What's this freak's deal
so I started crying
and they laughed at me
and I ripped the painting up
and I didn't go back to art camp again

CHARLOTTE

I got tired of feeling paralyzed
Like
I saw a boy once

In town.
He smiled at me
Right there in the street.
And his smile filled me with so Much
And took so much away when he left.
I thought, "I'm not strong enough for this."
I thought, "I can never do this again.
Be left.
Be smiled at."
I don't think those are normal things to think
So I taught myself not to think them
But sometimes I feel like
The longer I don't cry
The further away I get from who I used to be.
Will I forget how to be who I am?

KIMBERLY
You might
But you'll learn how to be someone else instead.

*Branwell and Luke sit side by side.
They pass a joint back and forth.*

LUKE
I had really bad bronchitis when I was little
Like
I got it all the time
Like
there's acute bronchitis and chronic bronchitis
and mine was definitely chronic
and ever since then smoke makes my chest hurt

BRANWELL
Two of my sisters died of tuberculosis, so...

LUKE
Oh shit

BRANWELL
Yeah
I can't think about it too hard or I get really freaked out and sad
so I just
don't think about it at all
and that seems to help

ya know?

LUKE
Oh man
That's really real

BRANWELL
Yeah
Sorry

LUKE
No no
it's deep
it's cool
I've been thinking about all kinds of deep shit lately
like
I'm dating this girl, right?
and she's the shit
she's so so so so so so so so so so so so so so pretty
and before I knew her
I would've described her as Hot
but now I feel guilty?
like "hot" feels cheap?
I don't know
stuff like that

Branwell breaks down.

Oh no.

*He's like
Fully sobbing
into his hands.
Luke holds his hands up like he could somehow be implicated in this crime.
After a moment, Branwell calms down enough to lift his head.*

BRANWELL
I know
Exactly
what you mean.
Do you
(holds back a sob)
Do you want to read a poem I wrote about love?

LUKE

Sure, dude.

BRANWELL

It's a love poem!

I already said that

Oh god

I'm so stupid

I'm so STUPID

okay

it's fine

here:

This is what being in love feels like

hands under tables

sleeping so close you can hear her eyelashes against the pillow

promises you mean but she breaks

panic attacks in parking lots

pints of ice cream

pints of beer

songs where the singer's voice cracks because they're so sad

acid reflux that keeps you up at night

walking to her summer home in the winter and breaking in

just to be somewhere that doesn't know she stopped loving you

Love

is a bottle of gin and a walk in the rain

He rips up his poem and throws it down.

Right.

Well.

I don't have anything else to say.

This was fun.

And then it wasn't.

He leaves.

A long moment.

LUKE

Shit, man.

Emily picks up the ripped up pieces of Branwell's poem.

She puts them on top of her head and spins around so that they scatter in the wind.

Lainey spins with her.

KIMBERLY

(to Luke)

Do you think I'm pretty?

LUKE

Of course!

KIMBERLY

Tell me exactly

be specific

what do you think is pretty about me

LUKE

I like your eyes?

KIMBERLY

What do my eyes remind you of

how do they make you feel?

LUKE

...I dunno

KIMBERLY

You don't mean it then

You don't think I'm pretty

LUKE

I

I don't know what you want me to say

KIMBERLY

Just say the right thing

Just say that I'm so fucking beautiful you can hardly contain yourself when you're around me just say that my eyes remind you of campfires just tell me my hair is soft

IT'S NOT THAT HARD

Kimberly slaps Luke.

It's not funny. It's scary.

Maybe it's so hard he gets knocked to the ground.

Anne is lost on the moors.

ANNE

Hello?

Hello.
I think I'm lost.
Oh no.
Okay
"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."
"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."
Dear God
Today was a nice day.
We went to a farm.
The farmer goes to our church.
I ate a fresh blueberry.
I ate a fresh strawberry.
I picked them with my hands.
I usually try to eat plain food
Things without any salt
It feels like it's good for me, to practice nothingness.
My best day ever was when I went to the fair and I had cotton candy –
a whole bag full of it.
Pink and blue swirl.
My worst day ever was when I went to the fair and I had cotton candy –
Charlotte told me that sugar rots my insides.
So I threw it up.
Pink and blue swirl.
I'm afraid of things that rot.
I'm afraid to touch a spider because it might be poisonous
I'm afraid to cut stuff with a knife because I might cut myself
I'm afraid to go outside at night because I can't see
I'm afraid
All the time.
Of everything.
Of everyone.
I do not know if this is normal.
Amen.

Branwell plays guitar and sings K-Ci and JoJo's "All My Life." It's okay if he's bad at playing and singing – in fact, it's probably better if we really see the effort.

BRANWELL

"I will never find another lover sweeter than you,
Sweeter than you
And I will never find another lover more precious than you
More precious than you
...
You are the only one my everything and for you this song I sing

And all my life I've prayed for someone like you
And I thank God that I – "

I would so love a world in which Kimberly takes Branwell's guitar and destroys it really violently in this moment.

If she can't do that for budgetary or other practical reasons, she should hand Branwell a bottle of alcohol that makes him stop playing and start drinking.

LAINY

These wounds don't heal the way they should with me.
They cut so deep and break so hard and
They linger

EMILY

They get infected
Puss and rust and crusty oozy scabs with colors foreign to skin
Greens and blues and mustard yellow

LAINY

I am a loaf of bread, and the world is mold, and I am so susceptible to the way it grows.
I am so susceptible

EMILY

I am too easy to get to

LAINY

I am vulnerable

EMILY

I am weak

KIMBERLY

Octopuses are solitary creatures.
They always live alone.

EMILY

Being alone is a strategy
Being alone is productive

KIMBERLY

Octopuses have three hearts and nine brains.

LAINY

I think too much I feel too much I am too much

EMILY

They can solve problems, remember solutions, and take things apart for fun

KIMBERLY

They can almost instantly match the colors, patterns, and textures of their surroundings

LAINY

They aren't raised by their parents

They are left to their own devices

and they know all kinds of things without being told.

EMILY

They can change their body shape to mimic other animals and fit in spaces as small as a coin

KIMBERLY

An octopus will eat its own tentacle when under a certain amount of stress

When it's the only way to escape

LAINY

They are highly intelligent and researchers say they're the closest things we have to aliens in terms of how their brains are organized and work

KIMBERLY

We can never fully evaluate or understand their specific kind of intelligence

LAINY

Why they do the things they do

EMILY

Why they are the way they are

KIMBERLY

The best tactic is to become anyone other than yourself

LAINY

No Lainy here

EMILY

Someone who doesn't care someone who keeps things inside and doesn't say them out loud

KIMBERLY

Someone who is very good at having a face of stone

CHARLOTTE

Emily is highly intelligent but wildly undisciplined.

KIMBERLY

Kimberly needs to learn to ask for what she wants.

LUKE

Lainey is weird

BRANWELL

Emily doesn't pay attention

AMBER

Lainey is too loud

KIMBERLY

Kimberly is too quiet

ANNE

Emily is intense

VANESSA

Lainey is too sensitive

KIMBERLY

Kimberly asks for what she wants too forcefully

LAINY

Lainey is wild

EMILY

Emily needs to take a step back

KIMBERLY

Kimberly needs

EMILY

I am so susceptible

LAINY

I am too easy to get to

KIMBERLY

I'm tired of being hurt.

I want to do the hurting.

A shift into Amber directly addressing Lainey.

Vanessa stands by awkwardly.

Emily watches.

AMBER

Lainey

Calm down

LAINY

I can't believe you

AMBER

I'm / sorry

LAINY

You PROMISED

AMBER

I'm SORRY

But Mr. Randall said that I did the right thing

Nothing bad's gonna happen!

You're not in trouble.

You're just going to get help.

LAINY

I hate you

AMBER

No you don't

LAINY

I DO

I HATE YOU

Why do you even want to be my friend?

It doesn't make sense anymore

Just go AWAY

AMBER

We were babies together.

I know all the Lainey's, from the tiniest kitten to now and beyond.

I've seen future Lainey's.

We're two people but we're one person and we always will be

LAINY

I

Am

Nothing

Like

You.

I never have been and I never will be and every time I look at you I remember all the things I'm not and if you knew all the things that go on inside my brain you don't understand don't make me just please please please please please please please please please please PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE

Lainey starts to move toward Amber.

AMBER

What are you doing?

Lainey you're scaring me

KIMBERLY

Do it

LAINY

Shhhhhh shh shh shh

Don't be scared

I'm just a little kitty-cat

Are you scared of kitty-cats?

VANESSA

Lainey hey

Calm down

Lainey hisses.

AMBER

Lainey this isn't funny

Remember what's real

LAINY

(speaking to Kimberly)

She always does this.

She doesn't like when I get in my dark-head-place so she tries to find ways to stop me, but I'm smarter than her, so I see what she's doing and it doesn't work.

KIMBERLY

I know, Lainey.

Because you're special.

You are.

LAINY

Yes.

AMBER

Lainey

Who

Are you talking to?

KIMBERLY

But you have to prove that you're strong.

LAINY

I will

Of course.

I'm sorry.

KIMBERLY

Don't be sorry.

LAINY

I am the opposite of sorry.

I am the opposite of worthy.

Please forgive me

I'll prove it

Kimberly hands Lainey the knife Vanessa brought.

Lainey takes it and faces Amber.

Amber screams.

Lainey starts to move closer to Amber.

VANESSA

...Lainey come on STOP IT

LAINY
No
Lainey
Here

Lainey stabs Amber.

*Lainey raises the knife to stab her again.
Her hand is shaking.
She drops the knife.*

*Lainey runs away – but she doesn't leave the stage.
She should end up somewhere to watch the next scene.*

*Vanessa helps Amber offstage.
(Amber does not die – this should be conveyed by where Lainey stabs her or how Amber exits.)*

As they exit, the following lines are repeated over and over again:

AMBER
Oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god

VANESSA
Okay okay okay okay okay okay okay okay okay okay

*Emily makes her way back to the Brontë home, but she doesn't walk.
She crawls, she slithers, her limbs become tentacles, she transforms.
She is an animal, and she does what must be done.
She finds a safe place to wait.*

*Anne and Charlotte at the table.
They have a stack of Emily's tiny books.
Charlotte holds a magnifying glass.*

CHARLOTTE
Is this all of it?

ANNE
Please don't tell her I showed you
She's going to be so mad

*Emily is seemingly calm, but there's a ferocity that nearly vibrates out from her.
If she were a dog, she would bare her teeth.*

EMILY

Yes

She Is

Beat.

CHARLOTTE

Emily

You're not in trouble

Anne did the right thing by showing me

You're a marvelous writer

EMILY

Put them down.

CHARLOTTE

You clearly have a gift, you just don't know how to use it

I can help you use it for good

I can help you fix this

KIMBERLY

She's taking Gondal away from you.

EMILY

Give it back

CHARLOTTE

No one will whisper about our family if they know we're geniuses.

KIMBERLY

She's going to show it to people

People who aren't worthy

LAINY

An octopus will eat its own tentacle when it's the only way to escape

CHARLOTTE

I can hardly even read it with the magnifying glass

Your handwriting needs a lot of work

EMILY

You're not SUPPOSED TO READ IT

You're not CAPABLE

YOU'RE NOT ONE OF THE WORTHY ONES

*She lunges after Charlotte.
Charlotte dodges her.*

*Emily hisses at Charlotte, lashing out and scratching her.
Charlotte drops the books, and Lainey picks them up.
Lainey hands the books to Emily, who holds them tightly to her chest and climbs onto the table.*

*She rips the pages from her books and eats them.
And eats them.
And eats them.
And eats them.*

*Anne reaches out to stop Emily, and Emily hisses at her violently.
Anne and Charlotte leave, fearfully.*

Emily continues to eat the books.

*Wind.
We see flashing lights – an echo of Skateland, or maybe police cars.*

KIMBERLY

My parents are selling the house
My parents are taking it away
The wind and the wild and the water and the trees and my

A fire burns inside a chimney and
A fire burns outside a chimney and
A house and a forest burn

Water puts out a fire
unless the fire is too big
Wind blows it out
or makes it spread

Here's how you get there.
You go
Up the hill to the right of the house

And you imagine what used to be there
Once upon a time
Before it burned down

Wind.
Sirens.
Strings.

LAINY
I've been told I'm too much too often for it to be untrue –

EMILY
We tamed the wild and thinned the trees –

KIMBERLY
Once upon a time –

EMILY
Where can I be wild?

LAINY
It's a process. It's a very long process.

EMILY
I've been told I'm too much too often for it to be untrue.

KIMBERLY
You take the metal shovel from the back of the truck.

EMILY
You do whatever you need to do with it.

LAINY
You do it quickly.

KIMBERLY
You use force.

LAINY
You do not flinch.

EMILY
You do not cry.

LAINY
You get behind the wheel.

KIMBERLY
You drive away.

Kimberly, Emily, and Lainey stand side by side.

Wind.

They lean against it.

It howls.

They link hands. Lean harder.

Kimberly, Emily, and Lainey inhale in unison.

Emily hands Kimberly a book of matches.

Kimberly lights a match.

She raises it as if to drop it.

end of play.

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